

Northeast Ohio Peace Group Condemns Pentagon Spying on Akron Area Citizens
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Statement of Dana Williams and Greg Coleridge of the Northeast Ohio AFSC

The Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker peace, justice and humanitarian organization, condemns the action of the Department of Defense (DOD) for their spying on Akron area citizens who took part in a peaceful and lawful march and rally in Akron on March 19, 2005 to commemorate the second anniversary of the start of the Iraq war.

We are outraged that the Pentagon would spy on citizens who were doing nothing more than expressing their First Amendment freedom of speech and freedom of assembly rights against the war and occupation of Iraq.

More than 200 Akron area citizens gathered at Perkins Park on March 19. We marched to a military recruitment center where a Mennonite and person connected to the Akron Catholic Worker community spoke. We then marched to the local office of the FBI where an immigration attorney spoke. We then proceeded to the Federal Building for a rally, where several people offered remarks, including two people with AFSC. At the end, we read the names of more than 1500 killed US troops in Iraq and more than a 1000 Iraqis killed. We then deposited those names in two cardboard coffins, which a few days later we delivered to the offices of US Senators Mike DeWine and George Voinovich. We also spilled water with a little red food coloring from a 55-gallon drum on the sidewalk to symbolize the blood being spilled on all sides in Iraq and that the war in Iraq was waged for oil and greed.

For these actions, our own government spied on us. We publicized our event widely beforehand as a peaceful march and rally. That day, we didn't block traffic. We didn't destroy property. We didn't threaten anyone in our speeches. Yet, we were photographed and monitored by our own government.

This is chilling. This is intimidating. This is outrageous. This should be totally unacceptable in a democratic society. Citizens that day were exercising their rights as guaranteed in the Bill of Rights under the United States Constitution. Yet our own government considered these actions a "threat." Any government that considers its own citizens who in a public space speak freely, assemble freely, and organize freely is itself a threat to freedom and democracy. In fact, according to the DOD document where our march and rally is listed, the event is still considered to be "Open/Unresolved." What does that mean? We demand from the local DOD office to know what is still "open and unresolved" about a march and rally we sponsored 9 months ago.

We call on our Congressional representatives to look into this matter, to tell us what they plan to do. We ask everyone to go to our website, www.afsc.net where an email message can be sent asking for Congress to act.

If the Pentagon is spending their time and energy using our tax dollars snooping on peaceful and lawful citizens instead of trying to find Osama bin Laden and protecting our borders from terrorists and drugs, then something is wrong. If the Pentagon has nothing better to do with our resources than spying on peace people in Akron, Ohio and elsewhere, maybe the Pentagon has too many resources than it needs. Maybe the Pentagon domestic spying budget can be cut and those resources can be used to increase, say, housing, transportation, education, and energy assistance here in Northeast Ohio. That to us is promoting true national security. Spying of Northeast Ohio Peace Group Condemns Pentagon Spying on Akron Area Citizens

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afscole@aol.com / 330-253-7151 □ citizens exercising their Bill of Rights only promotes insecurity and must immediately end.