ITOA Opposition Statement

The Illinois Tactical Officers Association (ITOA) is holding its 29th annual conference, a five day long SWAT training and weapons expo. This year the ITOA conference is taking place October 9th - 13th at the Stonegate Conference and Banquet Center in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, just one hour outside of Chicago. The Chicago Police Department has a history of collaborating with ITOA for tactical training, and ITOA has a long-standing relationship with the Cook County Department of Homeland Security.

ITOA promotes its use of military tactics with toxic racism and Islamophobia. Their keynote speaker this year will be anti-Muslim bigot and Fox News regular Dr. Sebastian Gorka, a self-proclaimed counterterrorism expert who has served in an advisory role to countless government and military agencies, from the CIA to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The conference will train local police and EMTs to operate “like tactical squads in the military” and incorporate “new data and surveillance technology” in their work, directly contributing to racialized law enforcement violence against communities of color in the Chicagoland area.

While Chicago is still reeling from budget cuts that have resulted in the closure of over 50 public schools, mental health clinics, and severe cuts to social services, the city spends over $4 million a day on the Chicago police alone. ITOA is directly involved in training and arming those police, even using empty school buildings as training grounds for Cook County officers. Weapons manufacturers from around the world also use ITOA to sell military-grade equipment to local police forces--equipment that shocked the country when it was deployed against civilians in places like Ferguson, Minneapolis, and Baton Rouge (and is used regularly by repressive governments such as Israel).

As part of the growing movement against policing, we call for the immediate cancellation of the 2016 ITOA Tactical Training Conference. We also call on Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle to end Cook County’s relationship with ITOA. Join us in demanding an end to ITOA’s training of law enforcement and EMTs from around Cook County and the Midwest in SWAT tactics. We demand that Cook County and the City of Chicago prioritize spending for human needs, including mental health care and education - not militarization and violence.

Endorsed by:
Assata’s Daughters
For The People Artists Collective
American Friends Service Committee - Chicago
The People’s Response Team
Lifted Voices
War Resisters League
Council for American Islamic Relations - Chicago
Organized Communities Against Deportations
Black Lives Matter - Chicago