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USA: Allegations of excessive use of force and ill-treatment of protesters in Miami

Amnesty International called today for a full and independent inquiry into allegations of excessive use of force by police during demonstrations in Miami on 20th November. The organization has also received dozens of reports of ill-treatment of those detained during the demonstration.

Police are reported to have fired rubber bullets and used batons, pepper spray, tear gas canisters and concussion grenades on crowds demonstrating against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations, leaving some people hospitalized and dozens more treated for injuries. Scores of people, including journalists and observers, were arrested during the demonstration, some reportedly subjected to ill-treatment in detention. Amnesty International is currently gathering more information on the reported violations.

"The level of force used by police does not appear to have been at all justified." Amnesty International said, noting reports that only a small minority of demonstrators had engaged in acts of violence.

Miami Police Chief John Timoney today issued a letter to the media stating that his department would be undertaking a comprehensive review of the FTAA security operation and would produce a public report.

"Any investigation into the violence in Miami must be fully independent and must also look into allegations of ill-treatment following arrest. If the force used is shown to have been excessive, then those involved should be disciplined, measures put in place and training given to ensure future policing operations in Miami conform to international standards.", Amnesty International stressed.

Amnesty International is investigating reports that some of those arrested during the demonstrations have been subjected to ill-treatment while in detention. One woman is reported to have been strip-searched by four male officers and left naked. Other reports suggest that detainees have been beaten and sprayed with pepper gas and high-powered water hoses inside Dade County Jail.

"If these allegations are true, Amnesty International would call on anyone found responsible to be brought to account in accordance with international standards" Most of those arrested are reported to have since been released, but Amnesty International is seeking information as to the legal status of any still held.

An event organized by the Miami chapter of Amnesty International during the demonstration was also hindered by police who surrounded the area and refused people access.

Background

Thousands of people took part in the demonstrations organized during the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations in Miami on 20 and 21 November. Around 250 people were detained, most released on misdemeanour charges including "disobeying" police orders to disperse, unlawful assembly and resisting arrest.

Amnesty International is advocating for regulations requiring all weapons that launch kinetic impact devices (objects which hit people) to be treated for practical purposes as firearms, and therefore to be used only by trained firearms officers and then strictly in accordance with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officers, which state, inter alia, that "Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury".

Public Document

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