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Switzerland: Security for everybody during WEF Davos policing operations

In the run-up to the World Economic Forum (WEF) scheduled to take place in Davos between 23 and 28 January and connected demonstrations, Amnesty International has urged the Swiss federal and cantonal authorities to ensure that the right to peaceful demonstration is protected and that international human rights standards are fully observed during policing operations.

"The Swiss authorities have a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of WEF participants, as well as of demonstrators, local inhabitants and property. However, it is also their duty to ensure that people are able to exercise peacefully their rights to freedom of assembly and expression," the human rights organization said.

In letters sent to the authorities last week, Amnesty International also drew attention to the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, the fundamental rights of people deprived of their liberty and international standards on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials.

In recent years, numerous reports of human rights violations by law enforcement officials have emanated from a number of countries in the context of policing operations surrounding major international meetings. During the last WEF held in Davos, in January 2001, 16 non-governmental organizations, including Amnesty International, Oxfam and Greenpeace, expressed the concern of the civil society participants in the WEF about severe restrictions placed on the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression guaranteed by international human rights instruments.

"The Swiss authorities must ensure that the sorts of human rights violations seen during previous demonstrations in Switzerland and elsewhere are not repeated," said Amnesty International.

Following the WEF Davos 2001, non-governmental organizations called on the Swiss authorities to review their policing strategy. Amnesty International notes that the President of the Confederation and the federal government, while deeming security measures necessary, expressed regret that "freedom of movement and assembly in and around Davos had to be restricted" and that official reviews of the policing operation and incidents surrounding the WEF 2001 were carried out both at federal and cantonal level.

Amnesty International recognizes the steps taken by the authorities in Switzerland to enter into dialogue with demonstrators in the lead-up to the WEF 2003 and welcomes the authorization given for a public demonstration to take place in Davos on Saturday, 25 January 2003.

Although Switzerland is not a member of the European Union (EU), in view of its stated position that it shares the same fundamental values such as respect for human rights, Amnesty International urged the Swiss authorities to heed the specific recommendations which the European Parliament issued to member states on 12 December 2001 "to ensure better protection of fundamental rights" during international meetings, and which made specific reference to the WEF Davos 2001 .

The European Parliament requested states to "avoid blocking borders or denying individuals or groups of people who seek to participate peacefully in legitimate demonstrations the right to cross borders". The European Parliament also recommended that states "avoid the use of guns", "avoid a disproportionate use of force and instruct national police forces to control violence and preserve individual rights even in confused crowd scenarios where violent law-breakers are mixed with peaceful law-abiding citizens".

"Amnesty International acknowledges that the authorities have an obligation to maintain public order and protect people and property from violence. However, policing must be carried out in such a way as to protect the rights of people engaged in peaceful protest," the human rights organization said.

Further information on Amnesty International's concerns about policing operations surrounding international meetings, including the WEF Davos 2001, is available on the web. See in particular:
AI Report 2002, Switzerland
Concerns in Europe: January - June 2001, Switzerland (EUR 01/003/2001)

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