

Canada: Amnesty International calls for public enquiry into alleged police brutality

In the aftermath of the Summit of the Americas in Québec City, Amnesty International is calling for a public enquiry to investigate police tactics and behaviour in handling the demonstrations which surrounded the meeting and conditions for people detained at Orsainville prison.

"Eye witness accounts -- including from our own observer -- point to the excessive use of tear gas by police against peaceful demonstrators, and the use of plastic bullets," the organization said. Figures announced by the authorities, including the use of around 800 rubber and plastic bullets and over 4000 gas and smoke canisters would seem to bear this out.

Amnesty International has written to the Québec Minister for Public Security and the Solicitor General of Canada expressing concern about the following violations of protestors' rights during and after the demonstrations:

The excessive use of tear gas on protestors not involved in violent behaviour or posing any threat to property or the police, including the firing of tear gas directly at individuals and directly into private property for no apparent reason;

The use of plastic bullets in situations where the safety of police officers and the integrity of the Summit were not threatened;

The use of an electro-shock device on a peaceful demonstrator who had refused police instructions to move, which is tantamount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;

The denial of prompt legal representation to those arrested;

The overcrowding of cells containing those arrested, including the holding of up to five persons in cells designed for one, for prolonged periods.

Amnesty International is reiterating its call, made before the Summit, that policing must be carried out in such a way as to protect the rights of peaceful demonstrators.

The organization is also increasingly concerned about the judicial system's treatment of political activist Jaggi Singh, who may have been punished for his activism. Amnesty International fears that the charges against him could be politically motivated and is concerned at the reported lack of evidence of his involvement in any recognisably illegal activity.

"We will shortly be writing to the authorities to obtain explanations on what appeared to be Jaggi Singh's prolonged incarceration following his arrest during the Québec summit, and details of the charges laid against him," the organization said.

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