

23 April 2001

AI Index AMR 20/002/2001 - News Service Nr. 72

World and regional summits: rights of free expression and assembly must be upheld

Following some incidents of excessive use of force during the policing of the Québec City summit of the Americas, Amnesty International today renewed its call for the rights of free expression and assembly to be respected on the occasion of similar events.

After examining a report from its observer in Québec City, the organization expressed concern about:

·the excessive use of tear gas on protesters not involved in violent behaviour or posing any threat to property or police, including the firing of tear gas canisters directly at individuals and directly into a private property for no apparent reason (the use of tear gas in enclosed spaces is extremely dangerous in certain circumstances);

·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 (taser gun) on a peaceful demonstrator who had refused police instructions to move. This amounts to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;

·the denial of prompt legal representation to those arrested and;

·the overcrowding of cells containing those arrested, including the holding of up to five persons in cells designed for two.

"Citizens have a legitimate right to express peacefully their views on the aims and objectives of the Americas summit without having to fear harassment by police," Amnesty International said.

"Yet on this as on previous occasions their right to freedom of expression has been curtailed by police action," the organization added.

"We recognise the difficulties faced in policing summits, especially as certain factions are set on causing violence. However, we believe that policing must be carried out in such a way as to protect the rights of peaceful demonstrators," Amnesty International said.

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