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Amnesty International dismayed at Canadian authorities' refusal to grant accreditation to G8 observer

Amnesty International today expressed its dismay and disappointment at the Canadian authorities' refusal to grant accreditation to the organization's observer of the policing at the G8 summit.

Having publicly welcomed the sending of an Amnesty International observer to the G8 summit, the police have subsequently refused to grant accreditation to the organization's official on the grounds that he does not possess "the background and knowledge of the law required to make balanced and objective observations".

"Amnesty International strongly refutes the accusation that its official in any way lacks the knowledge required to access the policing around the G8 summit," Amnesty International said today.

When observing the policing of the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001, the Amnesty International observer did receive official accreditation from the police. The organization can see no material difference between the experience and knowledge of this delegate and the current delegate to the G8.

Amnesty International's observer at the G8 summit in Calgary is Joshua Rubenstein, Director of the organization's Northeastern regional office in the United States. Mr Rubenstein has worked on human rights for 27 years and has previously been involved in international missions to Israel, Russia and Uzbekistan.

"Mr Rubenstein brings with him a wealth of experience and knowledge regarding human rights, along with the reputation of Amnesty International for impartiality and fairness. As an international delegate, he represents Amnesty International's 1 million members worldwide. It is unacceptable that the police in Calgary has refused him accreditation and we call on the authorities to reverse this decision with immediate effect," the organization said.

Amnesty International has previously expressed concerns around the policing of demonstrations at political gatherings in Canada. In April 2001, the organization expressed its concern about the excessive use of force by police officers during the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. Such concerns included the firing of tear gas directly at individuals or into private property for no apparent reason; the excessive use of tear gas on demonstrators not involved in violent behaviour or posing any threat to property or the police; and the use of plastic bullets where the safety of police officers or the integrity of the Summit were not threatened.

Amnesty International understands and accepts that the policing of high profile events such as the G8 summit is a complicated and often challenging task. "We welcome the commitment of the police to be 'measured and balanced' in their policing of demonstrations during the G8 Summit and call on the authorities to extend full cooperation to those who seek to ensure that all police officers work within international human rights standards and laws during the next few days.

"We believe our observer will help to oversee the protection of human rights and help to counter any bogus accusations of human rights abuses made against officers. "

Background

Amnesty International had sought to have its delegate receive official accreditation from those policing the G8 Summit along with five other observers from the Alberta Civil Liberties Association. All six delegates were refused accreditation via letter on 21 June 2002, just days before the Summit was due to commence. A similar delegation previously received accreditation from the authorities responsible for policing the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001.

Amnesty International fears that the lack of accreditation will severely hamper the observers' ability to fully observe the policing of the G8 by restricting their ability to move freely between the police and demonstrators. Furthermore, should violence occur, Amnesty International fears that the police may not be able to differentiate between violent demonstrators and observers, placing the unaccredited observers at risk.

Public Document

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