

USA: Amnesty International calls for an inquiry into police actions at WTO talks in Seattle

Reports of widespread police abuses against non-violent protesters and others during the World Trade Organization talks last week in Seattle are deeply disturbing, Amnesty International said today.

"The use of chemical sprays, restraint chairs and beatings appear to violate international human rights standards," Amnesty International said.

The organization is calling for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to fully and impartially investigate the use of force by the police against the demonstrators.

Allegations include:

the indiscriminate use of **chemical agents** such as pepper spray and tear gas against non-violent protesters, unresisting residents and bystanders. Some of whom were repeatedly sprayed in the face at close range.

Reports also indicate that a barrage of other potentially dangerous weapons including rubber bullets, wooden pellets and "flashbang" grenades were used indiscriminately.

According to some sources, symptoms described by victims, suggest that an unauthorized 'neurotoxic' chemical agent may have been used.

Systematic **cruel treatment** used to coerce or punish violent protesters for act of non-compliance such as refusing to give their names in King County jail. One person was slammed against a wall, beaten while lying on the floor and had his fingers forced back with a pencil. In another case, guards squeezed a man's nose, almost suffocating him, when he refused to give out his name.

Also at King County jail, people were allegedly strapped into four-point **restraint chairs** as punishment for non-violent resistance or asking for their lawyers. In one case a man was stripped naked before being strapped into the chair.

One woman was stripped naked by four woman guards, while a male guard outside watched. She further had her arms and legs folded behind her and was held down on the floor with the full weight of two guards on top of her.

Amnesty International calls for an independent commission of inquiry to be implemented, including examination by independent experts of the symptoms reported by those

exposed to chemical agents and the reported use of force in the King County jail and other detention centres. The results of these inquiries should be made public at the earliest possible date.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on + 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>