

MIAMI HERALD  
August 29, 2003

Commerce Chiefs to Face Calm Activism  
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Antiglobalization groups are planning seminars, a march, a vigil and a concert to put their agenda before the hemisphere's commerce ministers during a November meeting in Miami.

"This is an opportunity to get our message out to the negotiators, our elected representatives and other governments as well," said Gretchen Gordon, director of the Washington, D.C.-based Citizens Trade Campaign.

The meeting will gather trade officials from the 34 countries negotiating the Free Trade Area of the Americas, slated to go into effect in 2005.

Hosting a smoothly run ministerial is widely viewed as a litmus test in Miami's bid to house the FTAA headquarters. It's competing against Panama City, Panama; Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago; Atlanta; and Puebla, Mexico.

Other international trade meetings have been marred by anti-globalization groups, most notably the 1998 World Trade Organization summit in Seattle, which degenerated into a riot.

The 30 organizations participating in November's event, including the AFL-CIO, Public Citizen, Friends of the Earth and American Friends Service Committee, are committed to a peaceful process, Gordon said.

For instance, the AFL-CIO will provide about 500 members to act as marshals during the Nov. 20 march and rally in downtown Miami. "They'll wear vests, line the route, direct people to make sure it's an orderly event," she said.

The agenda includes workshops and forums from Nov. 18 to 22 on topics such as sustainable development, Hispanic issues, workers' rights, and globalization and Africa. Other events include an evening concert and interfaith vigil with the march and rally to be the highlight of the week.

The groups anticipate bringing in thousands of supporters.

"We really don't know how many, but we're thinking about 20,000," Gordon said. "There'll be a large mobilization of seniors from around Florida."

A spokeswoman for the Miami Police Department said security plans for the event have not yet been firmed up.