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Statement by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney

On Miami Police Conduct During FTAA Ministerial Meeting Protests

November 26, 2003

The AFL-CIO is deeply disturbed by the unwarranted and unjustifiable use of intimidation and force by police against peaceful protesters during the FTAA ministerial meeting.

The AFL-CIO engaged in good faith negotiations over several months with the Miami police department to ensure a safe and secure event, and we kept our promises. But the Miami police violated virtually every agreement. They blocked access to the rally and march for buses and individuals; deployed tanks and scores of officers in riot gear in front of the rally entrance; denied march organizers access to water, signs, and toilets; and pointed guns at and verbally abused those seeking guidance from the police. Peaceful protesters were swept up in police cordons, shot at with rubber bullets and pepper spray, arrested, and even mistreated while in police custody. The level of police presence and the aggressive stance taken by the police was leagues beyond what was warranted. It is clear that the protesters' basic right to have their voices heard was severely restricted, and that all Americans' civil liberties took a one-two punch in Miami.

We are currently examining all our options, litigation and otherwise, to ensure that those responsible for any abuses are held accountable, and that such intimidation and abuse of peaceful protesters is never repeated.

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