

## **Panel: Police Trampled Protesters' Rights**

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MIAMI (AP) - Protesters at an international trade conference last fall "were met with closed fists instead of open arms" by police who trampled their civil rights, according to a panel that is reviewing the officers' conduct.

The panel's draft report criticized "the unrestrained and disproportionate use of force" by some officers during the final days of the Free Trade Area of the Americas talks in November.

Violence broke out sporadically, with some demonstrators throwing objects at officers, and police hitting protesters with batons, zapping them with stun guns and using gas and sprays.

The draft report, released last week, offered "heartfelt apologies to the visitors who came to our city to peaceably voice their concerns, but who were met with closed fists instead of open arms."

While criticizing some officers, the report also concluded that "the vast majority" of Miami-Dade County officers acted "in a professional manner under trying circumstances."

Though the panel's main focus was the Miami-Dade Police Department, the panel's chairman, Jorge Reynardus, said the report is an evaluation of more than 35 law-enforcement agencies that monitored protests.

"It's a comment on what we saw overall. And some of what we saw is shocking and deplorable," Reynardus said.

Police spokeswoman Nelda Fonticiella said it was premature to comment on the report, which the department was still reviewing.

The review panel, appointed by the county commission, has no enforcement power but can recommend policy changes. Its nine members include four lawyers, a civil rights worker and a small-town police chief.

Trade talks make local authorities jittery because of rioting outside the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle and at other free-trade meetings worldwide. The demonstrators argue that the free trade sends American jobs to other countries, exploits cheap labor and drains natural resources.