

## FTAA protesters settle suit over strip searches in Miami jail

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MIAMI -- Three protesters arrested as they demonstrated against a free-trade conference have agreed to settle a lawsuit claiming Miami-Dade County jailers unnecessarily strip searched women, forced them to squat naked and "hop like a bunny" in open view.

The women and the county "reached a settlement in principle," but the final wording still must be worked out, Assistant County Attorney Jeffrey Ehrlich said Tuesday. The county has agreed to re-evaluate jail policies.

"We're reviewing them just to ensure that all of our policies and practices comply with the law," Ehrlich said. Whether the county would pay financial damages "is still being worked out."

Attorney Randall Berg of the Florida Justice Institute, which sued on the women's behalf, acknowledged the mediated settlement but had no other comment.

Former Miami-Dade Chief Judge Gerald Wetherington, who served as mediator, filed the settlement notice last week. Settlement of the federal suit challenging the constitutionality of the searches must be approved by Miami-Dade County commissioners before going to U.S. District Judge Adalberto Jordan for final review, which is expected in mid-March.

Charges against all three women were dropped shortly after their arrests in November 2003.

Judith Haney, 50, of Oakland, Calif., and Liat Mayer, 19, of New York City were arrested for failing to disperse outside a Miami jail in a demonstration calling attention to the detention of other protesters.

Both said they were strip searched in a room with the door open.

Jamie Loughner, 39, of Arlington, Va., was charged with resisting arrest and failing to obey a police order while holding a protest sign during the Free Trade of the Americas meeting, which gathered trade officials from the Western Hemisphere.

She said she was forced to strip in a cubicle and saw another woman doing the same thing in a cubicle opposite her. About 8,000 people joined protests and rallies in downtown Miami over several days during the FTAA meeting.

Witnesses said unprovoked police officers used rubber bullets, tear gas, Tasers and pepper spray on them as officers made 146 arrests.

A civilian review panel's review of law enforcement action concluded police trampled civil rights and left the city living "under martial law" during the talks. Other suits challenging police activity have been filed by protesters and a documentary filmmaker.