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FTAA Ministerial Ends With Setback to U.S. Corporations – Protesters Successfully Voice Message of Opposition to FTAA Despite Police Intimidation

Statement from Gretchen Gordon, Director

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Miami Ministerial has concluded abruptly in a serious setback for the major corporations that have been the driving force behind the agreement. The watered-down approach adopted in Miami was clearly an attempt to avoid a repeat of the collapse in Cancun.

As 20,000 people marched through Miami today, the undemocratic nature of the FTAA, and the growing opposition to the agreement, was clearly heard. Demonstrators marched in solidarity with the growing movements in Latin America opposed to international economic policies that are harmful to workers, communities, and the environment.

Prospects for the proposed FTAA to move forward in Congress were also nearly eliminated when negotiators again refused to include meaningful protections for labor and the environment by stripping already limited language from the draft Ministerial text.

On the streets of Miami, a plethora of law enforcement officers has made Miami into a virtual militarized zone. Police working overtime have targeted not only potential law-breakers, but also peaceful protesters opposed to the FTAA.

Yesterday, during the only day of ministerial level negotiations, the police acted with disproportionate violence, attacking demonstrators with tazers, tear-gas, rubber bullets, and batons. A festive rally closing the massive March for Global Justice this afternoon ended in a cloud of smoke and tear-gas after police advanced on the demonstrators gathered outside of Bayfront Amphitheater and began shooting rubber-bullets at protesters standing nearby.

This police violence caps off weeks of intimidation and harassment of protest organizers in Miami. Despite promises to the contrary, police arrested anti-FTAA advocates last week on illegitimate charges and have openly arrested and harassed other activists expressing their First Amendment rights by leafletting passersby.

The City of Miami, Dade County, the Federal Government, and all other authorities stationing officers in Miami must ensure that those officers immediately cease the ongoing intimidation of demonstrators, which continues today. We stand in solidarity with all demonstrators who have come to Miami to peacefully express their right to protest the FTAA.

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