

PRESS ADVISORY

Miami Activist Defense (MAD)

<http://www.stopftaa.org/legal>

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First Trial of FTAA-related Arrests to Occur Tuesday, January 20 at 10:00am

Ernesto Longa, a legal observer, charged with "failure to obey a police order" and "resisting arrest without violence" will go to trial Tuesday at 1351 NW 12th Street, Courtroom 4-9 in front of Judge Rosa Figarola

WHAT: The first FTAA protest-related trial is set to occur this week in Miami. Over 280 people were arrested before, during and after the "Free Trade Area of the Americas" meetings held in late November 2003. Approximately 120 cases remain unresolved and will likely proceed to trial over the next few months. Numerous charges have already been thrown out or reduced as a result of pre-trial hearings.

WHEN: Tuesday, January 20, 2004 at 10:00am

WHERE: Justice Building, 1351 NW 12th Street, Courtroom 4-9 in front of Judge Rosa Figarola

WHO: Ernesto Longa, a local Miami resident and law student, was a legal observer for attorneys with the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) during the FTAA protests. While acting as a legal observer, he was arrested on November 21, 2003, and charged with "failure to obey a police order" and "resisting arrest without violence." Longa was arrested while observing and documenting police action and misconduct at a peaceful vigil outside the Miami-Dade County Jail. Over 200 people had gathered to show solidarity for those arrested and attacked by police the previous day. Longa was among over sixty people unjustly arrested that day.

BACKGROUND: Ernesto Longa served as a National Lawyers Guild (NLG) legal observer during the FTAA protests. The NLG trained and dispatched dozens of legal observers to document the police conduct and action that violated the constitutional rights of demonstrators at the FTAA protests. Nationally, the NLG trains and coordinates legal observers at mass demonstrations around the country to protect people's right to protest free of unlawful government interference and police brutality.

In Miami, the deliberate violation of democratic rights by police resulted in the political profiling and targeting of protesters, medics and legal observers alike. This flagrant abuse of power is underscored by the widespread accounts of injuries due to police violence and the arrests of hundreds of people.

Many calls have been made to investigate the police violence and misconduct, which

characterized the protests. Yet, justice has yet to be served. Investigative bodies are slow to react and the State Attorney's office has remained steadfast in their intent to prosecute frivolous cases. Miami Activist Defense calls for the dropping of all charges stemming from arrests made during the FTAA protests.

A coalition of organizations has formed a national campaign as a result of the police reaction to the FTAA protests. The "Save Our Civil Liberties" (SOCL) campaign includes global justice, labor, environmental, community, and other organizations working at the local, state and national level to save and recapture our civil liberties and human rights.

For further information:

Miami Activist Defense - <http://www.stopftaa.org/legal>

National Lawyers Guild - <http://www.nlg.org>

Save Our Civil Liberties campaign - <http://www.saveourcivilliberties.org>