

Miami Activist Defense , 11.23.2003 16:58

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 23, 2003

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UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF POLICE VIOLENCE MALIGN PROTESTORS' RIGHTS WITH
NUMEROUS SERIOUS INJURIES CITED BY ANTI-FTAA ACTIVISTS

Legal support groups call for a full-scale independent investigation into "alarming" police behavior Miami, FL ? As organizations and people who fought against the recent Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations in Miami assess the outcome of their efforts, all are quick to agree that their resistance to the "unfair" trade agreement talks was met with excessive and unnecessary police aggression. While police publicly congratulate themselves on their "remarkable restraint," calls and written reports continue to flood into the offices of Miami Activist Defense (MAD), a legal support group for anti-FTAA activists, which refute that claim.

In a show of unprecedented force, and exceptional levels of brutality, police refused to allow people's political message to be heard. "Chief John Timoney justified his force's violent actions by claiming that, 'outsiders [were] coming in to terrorize and vandalize our city,' yet no evidence of that existed," said Marc Steier, an attorney working with MAD. "Presumption and political profiling cannot be used to violently deny people their rights," continued Steier. "The police made it clear that political speech critical of Bush's agenda on the FTAA is unacceptable and they were willing to hospitalize people to make the point."

The indiscriminate and widespread use of weapons by police in Miami was a significant departure from those used at mass protests in the U.S. in the recent past. A panoply of batons, tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, concussion grenades, tasers and electric shields, represented an extreme overreaction and unwarranted attack on people's first amendment rights.

A medical support group for protestors indicated Saturday that dozens of people sustained serious injuries over the past few days as a result of brutal arrests and weaponry used by police during the protests. Although many of those injured went to the activist "Wellness Center" instead of going to the hospital, at least two people are known to be hospitalized. One activist suffered from cerebral hemorrhaging and is in critical but stable condition. Another has been hospitalized for a traumatic head injury and recently underwent surgery.

Further reports from the medics indicate: hundreds affected by tear gas and pepper spray; numerous baton injuries; and over thirty people injured from projectiles fired by police, at least five of which sustained head wounds. "Police are supposed to point their rubber bullet guns at the ground in order to avoid directly striking someone," said Liz Highleyman, a medic. "This was definitely not the practice used on the streets as case after case indicated intentional direct hits."

In one of the most savage and completely uncalled-for tactics used over the last few days, police "combed" the city Thursday evening, after protests had concluded, making dozens of indiscriminate and brutal arrests. These arrests included people being stopped and ?snatched? at random and without warning by undercover police and taken away in unmarked vehicles as well as people being chased for blocks after attempting to peacefully leave the heavily policed zone. "It was almost as if police were 'hunting' activists," said Kris Hermes of MAD. MAD and the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) are calling for a full-scale independent investigation into the "alarming" police behavior. A letter sent Thursday by the NLG to Miami Mayor Manuel Diaz stated, "Such paramilitary tactics are ill-conceived and self-defeating and have no place in a democratic society." MAD is also demanding that the city and county drop the charges against all anti-FTAA activists.

As of Friday evening, MAD estimated that approximately 250 people had been arrested. Although most had been released, as of Saturday evening as many as 70 appeared to still be detained. Bond hearings over the last two days indicated that some were being given unusually high bails of \$20,000 for a single misdemeanor charge. Reports being received by MAD indicate that many felony defendants are being denied access to an attorney, a violation of due process.

One of the most obvious and visible cases of unlawful arrest was on Friday afternoon while approximately 200 people gathered for a vigil at the Miami-Dade County Jail in support of detained activists. Shortly after a press conference, held to convey the activist response to mass arrests and police misconduct, police forced the group to disperse.

"We were attempting to comply with the police order," explained Brenna Bell, an attorney working with MAD. "But when people began moving in the direction we were told to, they began arresting us anyway." At around 5pm Friday, Bell was arrested along with over fifty other peaceful supporters. Not only was pepper spray used unnecessarily during the arrests, but also Bell was kept for 15 hours in jail without food or water.

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