

Group Wants Investigation of Police Tactics at Miami Trade Talks

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MIAMI, Nov. 26 — Amnesty International called on Wednesday for an investigation into police tactics during last week's Free Trade Area of the Americas meetings here, joining a swelling chorus of complaints that the police used unwarranted violence to stifle mostly peaceful demonstrators.

Also on Wednesday, a coalition of labor, environmental and antiglobalization groups detailed an array of violent police actions against protesters, reporters and others trying to navigate downtown streets last Thursday and Friday.

At a news conference, members of the coalition said the police had fired on unarmed protesters with rubber bullets that left large welts, forced them to the ground and handcuffed them at gunpoint and used pepper spray on them. They said the police also stopped hundreds of people on the streets, searched them without cause and sometimes seized their possessions.

Dozens of protesters were jailed for hours or even a few days, and the coalition members said many had been denied water, food and, in some cases, medical treatment.

"This was a paramilitary assault," said Naomi Archer, a leader of South Floridians for Fair Trade and Global Justice, adding that the police seemed intent on violating the civil rights "of anyone who has an opinion that runs counter to those in power."

In a statement, Amnesty International, the human rights group, called for an independent investigation into reports that some of the more than 200 people jailed during the protests were badly mistreated.

The Police Department press office did not answer the phone on Wednesday afternoon, and an officer who answered a call to the chief's office said the department would have no comment.

The talks drew 8,000 to 10,000 protesters to downtown Miami, the police said. Though the Miami department, which has about 1,000 officers, led the security effort, about 40 law enforcement agencies and 2,500 officers participated. The federal government provided \$8.5 million to help Miami with security expenses.

Lynn Norman-Teck, a spokeswoman for Mayor Alex Penelas of Miami-Dade County, said that by all indications, the police had done a good job of "balancing between the rights of lawful protesters and the need for safety for all our citizens." She added, "If there are complaints, the mayor assures the county will look into them."

Since the trade meetings ended, a number of groups who came to protest free trade have expressed outrage at how the police treated them. Although a few dozen protesters threw bottles, rocks and smoke bombs at police officers and set trash fires, a majority was not looking for trouble, these groups say.

The United Steelworkers of America has called for a Congressional investigation into the police tactics, saying officers systematically intimidated its members who participated in a peaceful rally and march sponsored by the A.F.L.-C.I.O. last Thursday.

The trade talks came in the midst of a fierce competition among Miami and several other cities to be named the headquarters for a planned free trade zone stretching from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Miami has aggressively lobbied for the designation and planned the large police presence to prevent the kind of violence that erupted during trade talks in Seattle in 1999.

Critics have accused the city of using whatever means necessary to ensure that its downtown remained calm and attractive for the trade ministers.

John J. Sweeney, president of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., released a statement on Wednesday saying that the police had violated "virtually every agreement" made with the union in advance of its protests and adding that the union might sue.

The Florida Alliance for Retired Americans complained earlier in the week that the police had turned away 13 of 25 buses of retirees it sent to the labor rally and abused a number of retirees who did arrive there.

In a letter to the A.F.L.-C.I.O. on Tuesday, Police Chief John F. Timoney said he was conducting a review of police actions, but he also defended them. He wrote that the department had reneged on some of its promises to the union because the union allowed nonunion, potentially dangerous protesters into its events.

Chief Timoney explained that after some protesters tried to take down the tall fence blocking off the hotel where the trade ministers were meeting on Thursday morning, "the tenor of the day was changed and police were compelled to adopt a more defensive posture."

Nonunion protesters who attended the rally began attacking officers with projectiles after it ended, Chief Timoney wrote, adding that "a firm, rapid response was necessary to prevent severe injuries and significant property damage."