

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N18193234.htm>

18 Dec 2003 21:30:17 GMT

Amnesty says Miami police may have broken UN laws

MIAMI, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Police in Miami may have violated various international laws and covenants on civil rights and use of force when they crushed protests against a free trade meeting last month, rights group Amnesty International said.

In a letter to Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, dated Dec. 16 and made public on Thursday, the human rights watchdog repeated a call for an independent inquiry into police actions that led to more than 200 arrests and dozens of injuries.

"Concerns include reports of the indiscriminate and inappropriate use of nonlethal weapons on nonviolent protesters resulting in scores of injuries, the obstruction of those providing medical treatment, multiple and random arrests ... and the denial of the right to freedom of expression and association," Americas program director Susan Lee wrote.

Amnesty said preliminary investigations suggested police violated the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other covenants.

Miami was shut down for the Nov. 17 to Nov. 21 Free Trade Area of the Americas meeting, at which little progress was made toward creating the world's biggest free trade zone.

Phalanxes of riot police, backed by helicopters and armored cars, chased protesters through the city center after the main opposition rally on Nov. 20 by firing volleys of rubber bullets, pepper spray and tear gas.

While a few protesters threw rocks, the great majority of the 15,000 unionists, environmentalists, retirees, small farmers, anarchists and civil rights activists who took part in the Nov. 20 march against the FTAA were peaceful.

Amnesty said many were shot with rubber bullets while running away from police. Volunteer medics appear to have been targeted while helping the injured.

Miami Police Chief John Timoney has promised an internal review of police tactics, and has won the firm backing of city officials for the "restraint" shown by officers in preventing a repeat of the 1999 world trade riots in Seattle.

Critics say a police review is far from adequate.

A fledgling Citizens Investigative Panel, set up after a series of police corruption scandals, also plans hearings.