

## Demonstrators Vow to Sue Miami for Police Action During FTAA, Union Prez Demands Miami Chief's Resignation

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By Jason Jeffers  
Staff Writer

Although the face-off between police and protesters in the streets of Downtown Miami during the FTAA trade talks may have ended three weeks ago, the conflict may be soon be resuming in the courtroom.

Activists, legal observers and labor organizations are preparing to take action against the City of Miami and its police department for what they regard as infringement of their civil rights during the trade ministerial.

"The constitution was suspended and innocent people such as students and retirees had their rights violated," said Lida Rodriguez, President of the Miami chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. "The police used excessive force, and people were searched and had their property seized for no reason. Dissenters were treated like terrorists."

The ACLU has received 134 complaints against the Miami police, and anticipates filing litigation in another three weeks. Rodriguez anticipates that the first case filed will consider the treatment of New Times reporter Celeste Fraser Delgado who was arrested and had her property discarded en route to covering the protests.

"What we're looking to do is reform this police department and ensure that in the future, when police and protesters meet, everyone's rights are protected," said Rodriguez.

Last Wednesday, President of the AFL-CIO John Sweeney sent a letter to Attorney General John Ashcroft and Florida Governor Jeb Bush demanding an independent investigation into the tactics used by the Miami Police.

Members of the labor union participated in a permitted march on Thursday, November 20th to protest the Free Trade Area of the Americas, claiming that it will drive down the wages of American workers, as well as diminish their rights and endanger their jobs.

"Our right to deliver this message in a safe environment was systematically thwarted by police in Miami," reads the letter, which alleges that Miami police threatened several protesters with profanities, sexual language and guns.

Sweeney's letter demands that all charges against peaceful protesters be dropped and that those responsible for abusing the civil liberties of demonstrators be prosecuted. The letter also calls for the resignation of Police Chief John Timoney.

A similar investigation has also been called for by the human rights organization Amnesty International.

Timoney and other city officials have praised the efforts of the police department, and have alleged that they were attacked by protesters with tear gas and urine balloons. Last week Timoney told Miami's Civilian Investigative Panel (CIP) that "so-called coalition demonstrators" often attacked police lines from within AFL-CIO crowds. (The CIP plans to hold public hearings on the FTAA demonstrators "as soon as possible.")

Calls to the city of Miami were not returned by press time.

Some activists fear that the actions of the police in Miami will set a precedent for other departments around the country when dealing with demonstrators.

"We're appalled at the idea that this 'Miami model' could be used elsewhere in the country, what happened here is inexcusable," said Naomi Archer, spokeswoman for South Floridians for Fair Trade and Global Justice. "We're also disappointed with the city. Now we're seeing a head in the sand approach when we would hope that city officials would step forward and take some responsibility for what happened. It's shameful."