

CALL FOR LEGAL OBSERVERS NOVEMBER 17-21, 2003 IN MIAMI, FL

A broad range of groups and individuals will gather in Miami, Florida in mid-November to oppose the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and to express solidarity with people around the world struggling against the abuse of power of global corporations at the expense of human rights and democracy. The National Lawyers Guild (NLG) will support these progressive efforts.

The NLG is a national group of lawyers, law students, legal workers and jailhouse lawyers committed to the struggle for social justice since 1937. The NLG's Legal Observer program is part of a system of legal support designed to enable people to express their political views as fully as possible, without unconstitutional disruption or interference by the government and with the least possible consequences from the criminal justice system. (The Legal Observers are also known as "the people with the green hats" at demonstrations.) Legal Observers observe and document the activities of law enforcement in relation to the demonstrators.

For some time, NLG members have identified the growing frequency and severity of unconstitutional efforts to silence political dissent. In recent years, federal, state and local law enforcement associations, in cooperation with government representatives, have ignited a war on the right to assemble and free speech. Mass police presence and unconstitutional tactics against mobilizations of activists in support of human rights and against corporate globalization in Seattle, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Portland and other cities are among the most visible of these violations around the country.

The (so-called) USA Patriot Act and other institutionalizations of the government's treatment of political dissent as criminal has increased the need for the NLG to offer legal support that includes a strong, professionalized Legal Observer Program that demonstrators can rely on. The NLG will also be providing Know Your Rights materials specific to the protests against the FTAA in Miami, as well as materials designed for use by Legal Observers. The NLG's Legal Observer Handbook is available to download from our website at: www.nlg.org. We will be offering Legal Observer training programs and a briefing will be held just before the demonstrations begin so people from out of town may attend and participate.

The NLG has tightened up our Legal Observer Program, including the use of a more detailed application form and requiring a confidentiality agreement with a declaration that Legal Observers are not working on behalf of law enforcement. We will also be credentialing Legal Observers with event-specific, individualized badges and hats so demonstrators will be able to identify who has been trained and

has agreed to treat their information appropriately.

These changes are designed to ensure that activists can trust and rely upon NLG Legal Observers and to allow the NLG to continue to provide effective legal assistance in protecting people's right to protest. With the heightened and documented disruption and infiltration occurring in the movement, it is important for the NLG to take steps to ensure that a Legal Observer badge means that you are prepared to professionally and conscientiously carry out certain responsibilities that we have to activists. To those with that level of commitment, we welcome and thank you. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

TO SIGN UP TO BE A LEGAL OBSERVER:

Complete the attached application and confidentiality agreement. (If you are receiving this by email, the documents should be attached. If not, please email a request for them to: nlggainesville@hotmail.com) Both of these documents must be printed out, signed and returned by mail or fax to:

Mass Defense Committee
National Lawyers Guild
P.O. Box 2063
Gainesville, FL 32602
Fax: (352) 271-8347

Please do this as soon as possible, but in any event, prior to November 12th. After we have received your materials, we will invite you to join a listserve to receive updates, send you Legal Observer materials and advise you about the details of trainings, briefings and the demonstrations.

If you have any questions, please contact Andrea Costello at (352) 271-8890 or email to: nlggainesville@hotmail.com. For more information about the NLG Mass Defense Committee, visit our website at www.nlg.org.