



# NEWS RELEASE

## ACLU Calls for Denver Police to Stop Keeping Files on Peaceful Protesters

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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In a news conference held today, the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Colorado (ACLU) charged that the Denver Police Department is monitoring and recording the peaceful protest activities of Denver-area residents and keeping files on the expressive activities of law-abiding advocacy organizations.

The ACLU also contended that the Denver Police Department has inappropriately smeared the reputations of peaceful advocates of nonviolent social change by falsely labeling their organizations as "criminal extremist."

To support its contentions, the ACLU released several pages of documents that it says came from the files of the Denver Police Department. It also announced that it had written to Denver Mayor Wellington Webb asking him to put an immediate stop to the gathering and recording of information about the peaceful protest activities of Denver residents.



*Mark Silverstein*

"The few pages of documents we have obtained so far provide an alarming glimpse of the kinds of information the Denver Police Department is recording and the kinds of peaceful protest activity it is monitoring inappropriately," said Mark Silverstein, ACLU Legal Director.

According to the ACLU, the Denver Police Department has recorded the following kinds of information about specific individuals, all in files marked as "permanent":

- o membership in the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization dedicated to nonviolent social change;
- o organizing and speaking at events sponsored by Amnesty International;
- o attendance in 2000 at demonstrations sponsored by the Justice for Mena Committee, which sought to hold Denver police accountable for the killing of Ismael Mena in a botched no-knock raid in 1999;
- o membership in End the Politics of Cruelty, a Denver human rights group that focuses on issues of police accountability;
- o participation in protests against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Washington, D.C.;
- o membership or association with the Chiapas Coalition, a Denver group that supports the rights of indigenous persons in Mexico's poorest state;
- o the purported opinion of a member of the Chiapas Coalition that "global financial policies are responsible for the uprisings in Chiapas, Mexico";
- o being "seen" at a demonstration in 2000 protesting the celebration of Columbus Day;
- o license numbers and descriptions of vehicles used by individuals identified as participants in peaceful protest activities;
- o home addresses and personal descriptions of individuals engaged in lawful expressive activity;

- o the address of a private residence that an individual reportedly "frequents";

According to the ACLU, the Denver Police Department branded several local organizations with the label "criminal extremist," including the American Friends Service Committee; the Chiapas Coalition, and End the Politics of Cruelty. "There is no support for labeling any of these groups as either extremist or criminal," Silverstein said. "The members of these organizations vigorously deny the accuracy of these labels."

"The police have no legitimate reason to keep files on the peaceful expression of political views and opinions," Silverstein said. "Denver residents should feel free to join a peaceful protest without fear that their names will wind up in police files. By monitoring lawful expressive activity in this manner and by falsely branding law-abiding organizations as criminals and extremists, the police will make Denver residents afraid to express their views and afraid to participate fully in our democracy. For that reason, we have asked Mayor Webb to put an immediate stop to this monitoring of peaceful protest activities."

The ACLU also asked Webb to prohibit the Denver police from sharing the files with other law enforcement agencies; to order a public accounting of the scope and nature of the files; to notify individuals named in the files and provide an opportunity for them to review the information; and to preserve the files in case they will be evidence in possible lawsuits.

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