

Canada News-wire

Canadian artists to Chretien: The world is watching

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TORONTO, April 13 /CNW/ - Hundreds of Canadian cultural figures today released a petition to the Prime Minister regarding the excessive security provisions for next week's Summit of the Americas in Quebec City.

The signatories call on the Prime Minister to put the kind of effort towards securing the rights and safety of the protesters that he has put towards protecting the visiting heads of state. This has now become the largest police operation in Canadian history without a single act of violence in provocation.

"The violation of civil liberties in Quebec City is an offence to all Canadian citizens wherever they live," said actor Sarah Polley. "It is horrifying to those of us in the arts, who rely so heavily on freedom of expression to do our work." The petition is signed by well-known Canadians, including Margaret Atwood, Gord Downie, Atom Egoyan, Rick Mercer, Michael Ignatieff, Rubin Hurrricane Carter, and the Barenaked Ladies. They, along with more than 4,000 other citizens, argue that the massive police presence destroys the right to effective dissent. Yet government is constitutionally obliged to protect both freedom of speech and assembly.

"The caging of an entire city is both un-Canadian and a nasty message by a country known internationally for its high standards of freedom and civic tolerance," said author Susan Swan.

The petition was initiated by Naomi Klein and Sarah Polley as a small project in the arts community but it has exploded on the internet as citizens across the country have joined in expressing their outrage. In response to this demand, The Council of Canadians is now hosting the petition on its website and welcoming signatures from all citizens of the Americas.

"Had we been told a year ago that we were going to cage an entire city, no one would have believed it for a minute," said civil rights lawyer Clayton Ruby. "The Canadian government cannot tell the difference between democratic protest and criminality, but clearly Canadian citizens can.

The full text of the petition can be found at www.canadians.org.

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