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ANONYMOUS REPORTS SUCCESS OF MARCH 15TH PROTESTS AGAINST SCIENTOLOGY AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The second worldwide protest organized against the Church of Scientology by Anonymous is being hailed by the internet-based collective as a huge success. Compared to the protest held one month ago, the event held on March 15th saw a significant increase in attendance[1]. Additionally, more factual information has been disseminated regarding questionable practices undertaken by the Church of Scientology than ever before.

Preliminary reports indicate the addition of several new cities and several thousand new protesters. Anonymous persisted despite multiple attempts by the Church of Scientology to stifle this new wave of criticism, including scheduling counter-protests[2] with the intent of causing trouble, playing propaganda from loudspeakers[3] during media interviews, and spreading more disinformation.

Just days before the worldwide protests on March 15th, Church of Scientology leaders in Clearwater Florida attempted to file last-minute restraining orders against the whole of Anonymous[4]. Citing unrelated events as far back as 1996, they claimed to fear for the "personal safety" of the corporation known as the Church of Scientology Flag Service Organization[5]. The two events from the 1990's cited in the injunction filing are in fact accounts of ex-Scientologists that had discrepancies with the Church itself. Their initial petition was rejected without prejudice, and they soon re-filed an amended petition along with an order for recusal, in which the first judge quickly recused herself. After review by a second judge, the Florida judicial system again denied the request. The Church of Scientology was also barred from amending and re-submitting their petition again, citing abuse of Florida law[6]. The request was denied with prejudice to the Church of Scientology citing that an organization cannot file a restraining order. However, it was denied without prejudice to the individuals filing, stating that individuals rarely file as groups anymore, and they could each submit a new and separate case if they deemed it necessary. That day, a second case was filing citing a different Florida law. The judge, who had seemingly given judgments in favor of the Church previously, denied this filing as well. Stating in the order[7] that Anonymous had no leadership and there was no proof that the individuals named had actually committed the crimes that were listed in the injunction.

Not all went as planned though, with police using trumped-up charges and scare tactics in at least two cities to intimidate and arrest a total of four protesters worldwide. In Atlanta, their charges are (a) Protesting without a permit, (b) "Causing offensive or hazardous conditions", and (c) Wearing a mask. The arrest in Los Angeles was made shortly after the individual arrived at the protest for making Criminal Threats. This is the same individual, who only days before, was outted on YouTube by an account that Scientology has confirmed ownership of (and has since been removed for Terms of Service Violations), showing his full name and internet handle, calling him an accomplice to terrorism. In Battle Creek, MI, an 18 year old was arrested for wearing a mask and allegedly taunting. In all three cases, Anonymous members were well within their legal right but allowed the officers to complete their tasks without confrontation out of respect for the US legal system. A spokeswoman for the Church of Scientology confirmed that they were behind these videos and their release, stating that they had "researchers" that had found these men.

The identities of several Anonymous were released by the Scientology-owned Golden Era Productions studio in conjunction with their Office of Special Affairs[8]. This was done via videos posted to popular websites such as Youtube.com and Dailymotion.com. All accounts related to those videos were soon deleted and all videos rescinded from display due to Terms of Service violations and legal issues. The individuals who were named report being harassed by the Church of Scientology. This is in line with the Church's infamous "Fair Game" policy, supposedly canceled in the late 1960s and even then in name only[9]. A spokeswoman for the Church of Scientology confirmed that they were behind these videos and their release, stating that they had "researchers" that had found these men[10], citing that members of Anonymous have also taken credit for bomb threats and other criminal activities, which is patently untrue.

Recently, the Church of Scientology has begun to consider Anonymous a serious threat to its polished image. Acting in accordance with their previous habits, they have launched a new "Black Propaganda" campaign to smear the face of Anonymous and portray themselves as the helpless victims. A new DVD has emerged, entitled "Anonymous Hate Crimes"[11] which includes defamatory statements and references a threatening video posted to Youtube.com. Interestingly, this threatening video as seen on the DVD is of conspicuously high quality, implying that the Church of Scientology holds the original copy rather than a copy from Youtube. The Church of Scientology has also launched a new blog attacking Anonymous. They have begun to spread fear among the US legal system and police forces, going so far as to have the Dekalb County Police Department (Atlanta, Georgia) handle the protests with Helicopters, Riot Teams, and motorcycle police, and ticketing any drivers who honked in support of this peaceful protest[12]. This recent instigation by the Church of Scientology demonstrates the precise behavior that Anonymous protests against. Additionally, in Los Angeles, one man believed to be a private investigator hired by the Church of Scientology was seen flashing a gun to protesters in the crowd. He was pulled aside by police who verified his concealed weapons permit. When one Anonymous member asked him why he brought a gun to a peaceful protest, the PI responded "I didn't come here for a peaceful protest."

Preparations are already under way for a new event on April 12th entitled Operation Reconnect[13]. The aim of this event is to "reconnect" family members who have been separated by the Church of Scientology because of differing views on Scientology practices. In attendance will be former Scientologists, there to speak about their experiences and about the Church of Scientology's infamous Disconnection policy.

REFERENCES:

[1] http://partyvan.info/index.php/Project_Chanology/Raid_Archive/2008-03-15

[2] http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews_international_report:_%22Anonymous_%22_holds_anti-Scientology_protests_worldwide#Chicago.2C_Illinois

[3] <http://youtube.com/watch?v=ocqUSCz9SVU>

[4] http://www.sptimes.com/2008/03/12/Northpinellas/Scientology_fights_ba.shtml

[5] <http://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/civil/article416511.ece>

[6] <http://www.tampabays10.com/images/pdfs/scientology-anonymous1.pdf>

[7] <http://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/civil/article416511.ece>

[8] <http://youtube.com/user/anonymousexposed>

[9] <http://www.fairgamed.org/fairgame.htm>

[10] http://www.nypost.com/seven/03152008/gossip/pagesix/toms_church_counterattacks_101990.htm

[11] <http://anonymousexposed.org/>

[12] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dexAtZ54Sg>

[13] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSSgWd-9PS4>

<http://www.WhyWeProtest.net>