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[News Highlights](#) || [Front Page](#) || [Editorial](#) || [Politics](#) || [Sports](#) || [Business](#) || [Metropolitan](#) || [Regional](#) |
| [Foreign Relations](#) || [Features](#) || [General](#) || [Letters to the Editor](#) || [Stock Report](#) || International News |
| [Supplements](#) || [Star Archives](#) || [Advertising on Star](#) || [Advertisements](#) |

- [Battle line drawn in Genoa](#)
 - [Archer lands in jail for perjury](#)
 - [Two dead as Lankan police fire on demonstrators, opposition leader](#)
 - [Emergency looms over Indonesia despite compromise efforts](#)
 - [Future Indo-Pak talks to be based on Shimla, Lahore pacts: Delhi](#)
 - [Milosevic reunited with his wife in UN prison](#)
 - [Terrorists may attack US targets in Arabian peninsula'](#)
 - [Pressure mounts on Japan as ministers meet to rescue Kyoto treaty](#)
 - [American rape suspect indicted in Okinawa](#)
-

Battle line drawn in Genoa

Anti-globalisation harldiners vow to break down security barriers as
G8 summit begins today

AFP, Genoa

Anti-globalisation activists on Thursday vowed to scale or topple steel barriers set up to protect a Group of Eight summit and declared police would have to use violence to stop them.

"We have a plan A and a plan B, to climb over them or break them down," said Luca Casarini, a leader of the "Tute Bianche", or White Overalls, which groups some of the most radical activists in the anti-globalisation movement.

"We will try to retake every metre of the 'red zone'," the four-square-kilometre area around the summit venue at Genoa's 13th century Ducal Palace, he said.

The inner city is ringed by four-metre (13-feet) high barriers that block off 240 narrow streets to prevent any repetition of the type of violence that marred a European Union summit in Gothenburg, Sweden last month.

Italy has deployed 20,000 security forces to face down demonstrations.

"We will tell them to disobey, to use their brains," Casarini told reporters.

"To stop us they must use violence," he warned.

Casarini said activists would hold what he called a final training drill "behind closed doors" late Thursday, away from the prying eyes of the police, before a mass demo to coincide with the summit opening Friday.

Other members of the anti-globalisation movement, which preaches civil disobedience, were calling themselves "red zone invaders".

"These barriers are a 'wall of shame'," said Francesco Caruso of the Rete No Global (No Global Network), using a term once applied by western countries to the Berlin Wall.

The barriers were "humiliating and a declaration of war," said 20-year old Ruth, from England, who said she was willing to spill her blood in any confrontation.

Pointing to plexiglass shields, which up to 10,000 activists would carry during a planned march Friday, Casarini said that demonstrators would not use weapons of any kind. "We won't break any windows," he said.

Demonstrators have prepared for a robust response from the security forces, however. One showed a helmet, gas mask and yellow protective vest to reporters at a sprawling tent city set up at a sports stadium on eastern edge of the heavily-fortified city.

Several thousand demonstrators have been camping here for the past few days, many after arriving by train and bus from Britain, France, Germany and the rest of Italy.

Nearby, one of the legions of disparate activist groups, the environmentalist Earthlings, Recapture the Planet, touted for support on small billboards.

The steel gates symbolise the division between the rich and poor who cannot afford university and have no decent jobs, the Young Communists movement's Nicola Fratoianni said.

"We will free the city of Genoa," he added.

The weekend summit - which will be attended by political leaders from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States - will start at noon (1000 GMT). It ends late Sunday morning.

Blanket security and the departure of thousands of residents for an early vacation have turned Genoa, which has a population of more than half a million, into a ghost town, with many stores boarded up.

[\[Top\]](#)[\[Home\]](#)[\[Onirban Online\]](#)
