



MEDIA RELEASE

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Campaign Against the Taser releases report on Taser trial

***Stun guns in Aotearoa New Zealand? The shocking trial
A report on the New Zealand Police Taser trial
1 September 2006 – 1 September 2007***

The Campaign Against the Taser (CATT) has today released its report on the police Taser trial to assist informed debate on the decision due soon about whether or not the weapon will be issued to frontline police officers.

"Our report analyses the trial, which we monitored throughout, and raises very real and disturbing concerns about the way the Taser has been used by some police officers. A shocking forty percent of incidents between September 2006 and March 2007 were in breach of the Standard Operating Procedures drawn up to regulate Taser use during the trial", CATT spokesperson Marie Dyhrberg said this morning.

"Taken together with the increasing death toll associated with Taser use overseas, and the number of inquiries now underway in those jurisdictions, our analysis of the New Zealand trial makes it clear that there should be no hasty decision on Taser deployment here."

The CATT report warns that the Taser should not be introduced as a part of the New Zealand police arsenal solely on the basis of the police report on the trial, nor should the decision be made by the Police Commissioner alone.

"The decision making process is unbalanced and undemocratic: the same people who trialed the Taser and wrote the official report will now make the decision", Dyhrberg said.

"Our report recommends the decision be suspended until there has been a full and independent inquiry into Taser deployment and whether or not it is necessary and desirable.

"Introducing potentially lethal weapons into policing is a matter that must be fully justified before it is done - both to the public, and to Parliament which bears the ultimate responsibility for the welfare and safety of all New Zealanders", Dyhrberg said. "Following an independent inquiry, any subsequent decision must be made at Ministerial level, with every effort made to ensure a meaningful democratic process."

A copy of '***Stun guns in Aotearoa New Zealand? The shocking trial***' has been sent to Police Commissioner Howard Broad, Minister of Police Annette King, and Prime Minister Helen Clark.

Media contact:

Marie Dyhrberg, Barrister, and CATT Spokesperson

Tel: +64 9 360 4550

maried@mariedyhrberg.co.nz

Background information

'Stun guns in Aotearoa New Zealand? The shocking trial' has three major sections looking at aspects of the New Zealand trial, as well as recent developments around Taser use overseas.

1. The Trial: an analysis of incidents examines instances in which the Taser has been deployed over the year of the trial. It is clear that there have been repeated breaches of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), the regulations drawn up by police to regulate Taser use during the trial. At least forty percent of incidents involving the Taser between September 2006 and March 2007 were in breach of SOP. This inability to conform to regulations, even in the heightened monitoring environment of a trial, raises grave concerns. It demonstrates that, if introduced permanently, the Taser is likely to be misused or used in inappropriate situations. The section also looks at issues around mental health and racial discrimination in the context of the New Zealand trial.

2. Transparency and decision making: the trial process explores issues around the trial process in New Zealand. There has been a lack of transparency and openness during the trial period. Furthermore, police spokespersons have consistently shown a bias in favour of Tasers in its relations with the media. Opinion is also divided as to who should have the final say on the introduction of Tasers. As a result of these flaws in the trial process, a decision by the Police Commissioner to introduce the Taser will itself be flawed, and will not enjoy widespread legitimacy.

3. The International Context examines recent developments overseas. Heightened concern over the use of the Taser has caused crises of legitimacy for police forces in Canada, the United States, and United Kingdom. This has led to investigations, reviews and calls for moratoriums in various jurisdictions where it has been in use for some time. More than 290 deaths have been linked to the Taser in the United States since 2001.¹ The United Nations has declared that Taser use can be a form of torture and has 'proven risks of harm or death.'²

The Campaign Against the Taser is concerned that Tasers remain unacknowledged by the police force as potentially lethal weapons, despite increasing numbers of deaths following Taser use overseas. We are also concerned that the Taser will be used as a tool of routine force as opposed to one of last resort; and that vulnerable groups - such as those with mental health issues or children - will be subjected to electric shocks.

It is therefore our recommendation that any decision must be suspended until there has been a thorough and independent investigation into Taser use and its effects. Any subsequent decision must be made at Ministerial level with every effort made to ensure a meaningful democratic process. This must include actively involving those communities most likely to be adversely affected by any taser deployment in the decision making process.

The Campaign Against the Taser report is available at www.converge.org.nz/pma/tasertrial.pdf

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¹ Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International's concerns about Taser use: Statement to the United States Justice Department inquiry into deaths in custody', October 2007. This is the text of an oral briefing given to the United States Justice Department as part of their two year inquiry into deaths in custody following Taser shocks, which began in June 2006 following reports of more than 150 deaths of individuals subdued by Tasers.

² UNOG, 'Committee against Torture Concludes Thirty-ninth Session', 23 November 2007, [http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/\(httpNewsByYear_en\)/D3DD9DE87B278A87C125739C0054A81C?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/(httpNewsByYear_en)/D3DD9DE87B278A87C125739C0054A81C?OpenDocument)