

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Canada: Amnesty International reiterates call to suspend police use of tasers following airport death**

Amnesty International (AI) is reiterating its call on the Canadian authorities to suspend use of tasers, after watching a video showing the last moments of a man who died after being stunned by police at Vancouver International Airport last month.

The video footage released this week shows Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski being restrained after he became agitated in the airport arrivals area. The video shows him being stunned more than once, including while he was restrained on the floor by police officers. According to an eye witness, an officer also used his knee to pin Dziekanski's neck and head against the ground. Another officer is seen striking him several times with a baton. Minutes later, a medical emergency team pronounced him dead at the scene.

The case reinforces AI's concerns about the safety of electro-shock weapons as well as police use of excessive force. AI has documented 16 other cases in recent years where individuals have died in Canada after being stunned with police tasers. Nearly all were subjected to multiple shocks as well as other force. In the overwhelming majority of cases those who died were unarmed and did not appear to present a serious threat when they were subdued by police.

International standards require that police should use force only as a last resort, in proportion to the threat posed and in a manner designed to minimize pain and injury. In Robert Dziekanski's case, AI is concerned that police appeared to have flouted such standards by resorting almost immediately to the use of tasers, without exhausting non-violent means. AI is also concerned by the overall levels of force deployed, including what may have been a dangerous restraint hold.

AI said there remained serious questions about the health risks involved in electro-shock weapons. The potential dangers of being subjected to multiple shocks were highlighted in a report commissioned by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which warned in 2005 that "police officers need to be aware of the adverse effects of multiple, consecutive cycles" of electro-shock weapons.

In the USA more than 280 people have died after being shocked by police tasers. Although coroners have attributed most such deaths to other causes, the taser was found to have been a cause or possible contributory factor in more than 30 of the deaths.

In a report issued earlier this year, AI called on the Canadian authorities to suspend their use of tasers pending a rigorous, independent inquiry into their use and effects. Departments which continue to use them should strictly limit their use to situations where officers would otherwise be justified in using deadly force, when no lesser means were available.

For more information, please see Amnesty International's report: "Canada: Inappropriate and excessive use of tasers" <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr200022007>

