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November 25, 2007

Via Facsimile (613) 993-0260

R.C.M.P. Commissioner William Elliot
R.C.M.P. Headquarters Bldg.
1200 Vanier Parkway
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0R2

Dear Commissioner Elliot:

I am writing to ask you to impose an immediate moratorium on the use of tasers by R.C.M.P. officers in Canada.

Over 300 people have died in North America in the past six years after being shocked with this weapon by police officers. In Canada alone, the number of reported deaths has now risen to 19. A number of those deaths have occurred in the past two years amidst suggestions of multiple or prolonged taser discharges by members of your force. This, in spite of the fact that an August 2005 study commissioned by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police warned that "police officers need to be aware of the adverse effects of multiple, consecutive" taser discharges on human subjects.¹

There are a number of other disturbing reports of the abusive use of tasers by members of the R.C.M.P. and other law enforcement officers across Canada that are detailed in two studies published by

¹ Canadian Police Research Centre, *Review of Conducted Energy Devices. Technical Report TR01-2006*, August 22, 2005, page 18 and page 34; see also British Columbia Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, *Taser Technology Review Final Report, OPCC File No. 2474*, June 14, 2005, pages 31-32, and Cronin, James M. and Joshua A. Ederheimer (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and Police Executive Research Forum), *Conducted Energy Devices: Development of Standards for Consistency and Guidance*, 2006, page 23



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Amnesty International in 2004² and 2007.³ In many of the documented cases, tasers were used against civilians who were already detained in custody, sometimes in handcuffs, and often under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

We are extremely concerned that police training does not strictly limit the authorized use of tasers to those situations where individuals pose a probable threat of serious injury to themselves or others. Just last week, Mr. Paul Kennedy, Chairman of the R.C.M.P. Public Complaints Commission, reported to the *Globe and Mail* that there have been instances where he thought tasers were "being used inappropriately" by members of your force "at too early a level of intervention".⁴ Moreover, it was recently reported by the Canadian Press that in 563 out of over 600 reported R.C.M.P. taser incidents between 2002 and 2005, these weapons were used by members of your force to ensure compliance, rather than to defuse major threats. In a further 105 cases, it was reported that R.C.M.P. officers tasered prisoners who were already detained, the vast majority of whom were unarmed.⁵

The very recent deaths in British Columbia of Richard Dziekanski and Robert Knipstrom after they were tasered by R.C.M.P. officers in Vancouver and Chilliwack, has made the need for urgent action even more pressing. Their deaths are the latest in a series of taser incidents in this country that raise serious questions about the safety of these weapons, and the training received by R.C.M.P. officers who use them.

Canadians deserve immediate action and leadership from the R.C.M.P. on this issue. Only an immediate moratorium on the use of tasers by your members will ensure that Canadians continue to have full confidence in their national police force.

Yours truly,



Frank Addario
President

² *Canada: Excessive and Lethal Force? Amnesty International's concerns about deaths and ill-treatment involving tasers* (AI Index: AMR 20/002/2004), pages 9-13

³ *Canada: Inappropriate and excessive use of tasers* (AI Index: AMR 20/002/2004), pages 9-12

⁴ "Tasers used too often, too soon, investigator says" (November 22, 2007) *The Globe and Mail*

⁵ "Tasers Necessary Day Says" (November 19, 2007) *The Toronto Star*