

I write with reference to the current Scrutiny review of the potential Police use of Tasers in Jersey. I believe that such weapons are entirely unnecessary in Jersey, would adversely affect the relationship between the police and the public, and ultimately represent a danger to public safety.

The panel may be familiar with the terrible news story from 2008 when a lost, confused and anxious Polish man who had just arrived at a Canadian airport was repeatedly electrocuted by police officers until he died. The man, who had very little English and who had never been in the country before, was expecting to meet his elderly mother in the arrivals hall. Anxious because she had not appeared, he attempted to communicate with airport staff to try to locate her, but as nobody could speak Polish, he became frustrated and started shouting. Police were called, and instead of sitting him down, restraining or arresting him as necessary, and trying to find a Polish interpreter in order to get to the bottom of the problem, they opened fire with their Tasers, killing him as he wretched and writhed on the floor. Needless to say, this sickening story caused an outcry in Canada.

What lessons can be learned from this tragic event? Some may claim that this should have never happened and that the fault lies with the policemen involved. I would assert that the fault lies just as much with the Taser, however, because without recourse to it, those same policemen would have had to take a more reasonable and measured approach to the situation. One might be tempted to think that this was a one-off, an isolated mistake. Unfortunately, however, it rather represents one of a series of occasions, in various countries, where the intervention of Tasers has proved to be fatal. Police forces in Commonwealth countries have a a good deal in common, and often follow one another in adopting the latest techniques and technologies. Generally, this allows for progress to be made in terms of effective policing and public safety. The example of the Taser, however, is illustrative of the potential for a police force to endanger public safety, and to reduce the estimation in which it is widely held, through the inappropriate adoption of a deadly innovation.

I understand a defence of the possible introduction of Tasers has been made by the Chief Officer of the States of Jersey Police in terms of the need to protect the health and safety of his police officers. I would remind him, and the panel, of the concurrent need to protect the health and safety of the general public. Tasers do not have a good safety record. Furthermore, projectile electrocution may be considered as cruel and unusual punishment and, as such, presents a serious human rights issue. All police officers are trained to deal with threatening situations, and firearms officers are trained to deal with potentially life-threatening situations. Where a suspect has a firearm, an armed response by the police appears to be a reasonable course of action. Where a suspect does not have a firearm, the police already have a number of measures which can be used to deal with the situation at close quarters or, with the aid of retractable batons and CS spray, at a distance. It is thus not apparent to me where the pressing need for Tasers might arise. Given the role of the States of Jersey in overseeing the operations of the police, I urge the panel to consider the gravity of allowing such weapons into the island. If we avoid the use of this technology, we avoid the possibility of a tragic event such as that which took place in Canada from occurring over here.

Jersey's community does not need stun guns. Jersey earns praise and talk of emulation from UK officials for its active restorative justice in the shape of the Parish Hall Inquiry. It boasts a perennially low crime rate. It positively exudes democratic forward-thinking by being perhaps the only place in the world that allows police officers to be elected to their position by the policed through the Honorary system. Our island is not a jurisdiction in need of the dangerous, unpredictable, cruel and unusual punishment of the Taser. Indeed, the prospect of summary electrocution greatly alters and disturbs the relationship between citizen and police officer; a relationship that is built on trust and reasoned judgment. To bring the blunt, indiscriminating and potentially lethal Taser into the equation can only lead to a greater separation between the public and the police – something that adversely affects both, and that impedes any movement towards a safer community for all.

**Rory Hill. 30th April 2012**