



Joint Press Release

9 March 2023

Stop the use of Conductive Energy Devices (Tasers) by the Maldives Police Service.

The undersigned organizations condemn the lack of transparency and arbitrary nature of the decision of the Maldives Police Service to begin using Conductive Energy Devices (CEDs), namely the Taser 7, from 26 February 2023. We call on the Minister of Home Affairs and the Commissioner of Police to immediately stop its use in the Maldives.

Taser guns are powerful weapons that deliver an electric shock of approximately 50,000 volts through direct contact or propelled darts attached to wires, to incapacitate a targeted person by disrupting the voluntary control of muscles. The Scientific Advisory Committee on the Medical Implications of Less-Lethal Weapons (SACMILL) of the United Kingdom stated in 2016 that, CEDs have the potential to contribute to serious injury and death, including cardiac capture if shot close to the heart. Additionally, victims who have been targeted with Taser guns have reported feeling excruciating pain¹.

Police impunity, misconduct and excessive use of force are serious issues that have caused great harm in the Maldives, including serious physical and psychological damage. Even after the recent introduction of body worn cameras by the MPS, there has been little improvement in accountability for police personnel who commit crimes of police brutality, torture and other misconduct. The allowance of police personnel to use CEDs without reforming the Maldives Police Service of its culture of violence and impunity is unacceptable and must be stopped.

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-taser-stunned-idUSKCN1BV1EW>



According to a 2018 report by Amnesty International that examined cases of death following Taser use, 90% of the victims were unarmed and many were shocked multiple times². Another study by Reuters found that the use of Taser guns was cited as a cause or contributor to 150 deaths in the USA and many of the victims were from vulnerable populations, such as people with mental illnesses, in psychological distress, and seeking help³.

Hence the statement by the Police Spokesperson, Chief Superintendent of Police Yoonus Sobah in late November 2022, that police officers can use CEDs “to control a person attempting to harm themselves” is particularly concerning⁴. Being electrocuted by a Taser gun could possibly result in a fatality or cause long-lasting or permanent harm, especially to people with mental illnesses, physical and psychosocial disabilities, and chronic illnesses.

The Police Spokesperson also stated that he has not observed major public concerns on the matter. In the absence of any public consultation prior to the determination of the use of CEDs in the Maldives, the Police Spokesperson’s statement is misleading and akin to misinformation.

Contrary to the statements made by the police spokesperson that Taser guns are the safest less-lethal tool, and that “many” studies show that they do not cause permanent harm, empirical evidence is inconclusive on the subject and should not be used to promote the use of a device that can cause physical and psychological harm to human beings. We further invite the Maldives Police Service to share the studies, referred to by the Police Spokesperson Chief Superintendent of Police Yoonus Sobah, with us at the earliest.

We believe that arming police officers deviates from any meaningful reform to the institution as a whole and that the funding utilised for arming officers can be better spent in areas such as improving the serious weaknesses observed in the investigative and crime prevention

² <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/amnesty-international-urges-strict-limits-on-police-taser-use-as-u-s-death-toll-reaches-500/#:~:text=According%20to%20data%20collected%20by,arrest%20or%20while%20in%20jail>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-taser-911/>

⁴ <https://mihaaru.com/report/115301>



areas of the MPS, such as in the report of the Special Envoy to the Government of Maldives⁵, Honourable Abbas Faiz, and several reports of the police oversight bodies in the past years.

We call on the Police board to ensure that an inventory of all recommendations made to the MPS in relation to police violence are reviewed and implemented, including taking disciplinary action against all police personnel involved in violent acts.

We call on the Maldivian authorities to:

- Immediately stop the use of CEDs in the Maldives,
- Publicly disclose the evidential basis upon which the decision was made to arm the Maldives Police Service with CEDs (Taser 7),
- Publicly disclose the safeguards and penalties that are in place to ensure CEDs are not misused.
- Responsibly use limited available public funds to improve the professional policing competencies of officers and to build community policing services to address the perennially unaddressed competency gaps in policing in the Maldives.

Association for Democracy in the Maldives (ADM)

Hands Together

Mental Health Support Group (MHSG)

Rise Up Maldives

Save Maldives

Ends.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/tweetafaiz/status/1522530134712066049?lang=en>