“I STILL CAN’T SLEEP AT NIGHT”

THE GLOBAL ABUSE OF ELECTRIC SHOCK EQUIPMENT

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Electric shock has long been a common method of inflicting torture or other forms of ill-treatment worldwide. While electric shocks are sometimes inflicted using makeshift equipment – for instance, car batteries, mains wires or cattle prods - a wide variety of electric shock devices are specifically designed for and marketed to law enforcement. These range from electric shock stun guns, batons, shields and body-worn electric shock devices which deliver electric shocks through direct contact with the body, to projectile electric shock weapons (PESWs) which can be fired from a distance, but which also can be used in direct contact "drive stun" mode.

Portable and easy to use, with the capacity to inflict severe pain at the push of a button, electric shock equipment designed for law enforcement has often raised human rights concerns. Despite the clear human rights risks associated with its use, there are no global regulations controlling what type of electric shock law enforcement equipment is permitted to be manufactured and used, or how and where equipment which can have a legitimate role in law enforcement, such as PESWs, can be traded.

This report brings together illustrative cases of both categories of electric shock equipment used for law enforcement which show the true human cost of the unregulated trade in and use of these goods, and the urgent need for coordinated, global action on this issue. It features disturbing cases of torture and other ill-treatment using this equipment from all regions documented by Amnesty International, other civil society organisations, as well as United Nations (UN) and regional torture prevention bodies over the last decade.

DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS

The first part of this report looks at the use of direct contact electric shock weapons used for law enforcement in acts of torture and other ill-treatment. Direct contact electric shock weapons and devices do not incapacitate individuals but deliver painful shocks. They have no legitimate law enforcement role that could not be achieved through less harmful means. The physical effects of these devices are often hidden and difficult to medically document, but testimonies gathered by Amnesty International, UN bodies and other organisations are harrowing. These devices can cause severe suffering, long-lasting physical disability and psychological distress which can destroy an individual's sense of dignity. Prolonged use can even result in death.

Law enforcement's use of direct contact electric shock weapons – such as stun guns, electric shock batons and PESWs in direct contact mode - has been documented on the street, at borders, in migrant and refugee detention centres, mental health institutions, police stations, prisons, and other places of detention. Law enforcement officials have used different types of direct contact electric shock weapons to threaten, harass, punish, force confessions and otherwise coerce detainees. These inherently abusive devices have been used time and again against protesters, students, political opponents, women and girls (including pregnant women), children, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and prisoners of war, among others. Survivors have suffered burns, numbness, miscarriage, urinary disfunction, insomnia, exhaustion and profound psychological trauma.

The gravity of the human rights impact of this equipment underlines the urgent need for a legally-binding global ban on all direct contact electric shock weapons designed for law enforcement. This must include the removal of the so-called "drive stun" direct contact mode in most PESW models currently on the market.

PROJECTILE ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS (PESWs)

The second part of this report looks at the misuse of PESWs. Used as a stand-off weapon, PESWs can play a legitimate role in law enforcement, as a less lethal alternative to firearms. However, given the high risks of primary and secondary injuries (e.g. from falls), their use must be set at a high threshold – that is situations involving a threat to life or risk of serious injury which cannot be contained by less extreme options. This would allow appropriately trained officers to deploy such weapons as a last resort at or just before the point at which they would otherwise be justified in resorting to firearms. But in practice, as PESWs have become an increasingly prevalent policing tool both on the street and in places of detention, the use and abuse of these weapons has increased.

Law enforcement officials have used PESWs as a stand-off weapon against individuals who pose no risk of violence, simply for punishment or compliance with orders. They have also used PESWs against vulnerable groups, such as those suffering mental health crises, older people and children, in situations where there was no threat to life or risk of serious injury. Systemic racism and all forms of discrimination are deeply ingrained in law enforcement practices, disproportionately affecting racialized and marginalized groups. Although the lack of disaggregated data in the use of PESWs remains a structural challenge in addressing its discriminatory impacts, limited data available and other studies have shown patterns of PESWs' discriminatory deployment against racialized and marginalized groups, such as young Black men.

The use and medical effects of PESWs as a stand-off weapon has been subject to extensive debate and scrutiny over many years. International human rights bodies have consistently underscored the potential for PESWs to be used in ways that violate human rights, including the prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, the right to life, and the right of peaceful assembly. The use of PESWs has been

linked to serious injuries, sometimes from falls, and deaths. International and regional torture prevention bodies have recommended that states must have in place robust regulations on human rights-compliant use, ensure that law enforcement officials are properly trained, and establish independent oversight mechanisms to investigate and address any incidents of misuse, including providing for an effective remedy and reparation for victims. They have also stressed the dangers of the use of PESWs against vulnerable groups, including children, older people, people with underlying medical conditions, pregnant women and people suffering mental health crises.

Despite much criticism, there has been steady acceptance and growing trade and deployment of PESWs in police forces around the world, extending beyond North America and Europe, to Latin America and parts of Asia and Africa.

THE PRODUCTION OF AND TRADE IN ELECTRIC SHOCK EQUIPMENT

The global trade in both direct contact electric shock weapons and equipment used for law enforcement and PESWs is substantial and continuing to grow. At least 197 companies from all regions manufactured or promoted direct contact electric shock equipment for law enforcement between January 2018 and June 2023. Most security trade fairs market direct contact electric shock weapons. In relation to PESWs, according to the world's leading manufacturer, Axon Enterprise, Inc., their TASER brand models are currently in use by over 18,000 law enforcement agencies in more than 80 countries, with in excess of 960,000 TASER energy weapons currently in service globally.

While the EU and some states do regulate the trade in some law enforcement electric shock weapons and equipment, there are no global controls on their production and trade, leaving an inadequate patchwork of regulations. In contrast to the trade in conventional weapons, there are no UN bodies reporting on global trade in law enforcement goods and few states or companies publish trade figures. Worryingly, almost all states still allow the production of and trade in direct contact electric shock equipment, such as stun guns, batons and shields, which the UN Special Rapporteur of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment's (UN Special Rapporteur on Torture) considers to be inherently abusive.

In relation to companies manufacturing and trading this equipment, there is a clear global consensus that companies have a responsibility to respect human rights, as reflected in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Guiding Principles). This responsibility requires companies to conduct human rights due diligence throughout their entire value chain to identify, prevent, and mitigate any actual or potential involvement in human rights abuses. Companies should carry out human rights due diligence on all transfers of PESWs and cease all transfers where there is a clear risk that the company's goods could be used for torture or other ill-treatment, irrespective of whether their home state licenses such transfers.

In line with the conclusions of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture's thematic report on the torture trade (see below), companies producing direct contact electric shock equipment for law enforcement should immediately cease production and destroy and decommission any stocks of prohibited goods. Those producing PESWs should remove the direct contact "drive stun" mode from all future models and cease production of models which have this mode.

A TORTURE-FREE TRADE TREATY

COULD FINALLY REGULATE THE TRADE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT EQUIPMENT AND BAN INHERENTLY ABUSIVE GOODS

THE NEED FOR LEGALLY-BINDING GLOBAL REGULATION

In September 2017, the EU, Argentina and Mongolia launched the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade at the margins of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. The Alliance currently comprises 62 states from all regions of the world pledging to "act together to further prevent, restrict and end trade" in goods used for torture, other ill-treatment and the death penalty. The establishment of the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade prompted a series of UN resolutions and reports aimed at establishing common international standards, consolidating this issue in the UNGA.

In October 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture presented a thematic report on the torture trade at the UNGA. The report included two lists: the first identifying specific types of law enforcement equipment which were deemed inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading and which should be prohibited; and the second identifying law enforcement equipment that could be readily misused for torture or other ill-treatment and whose trade should be stringently controlled.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture stated that direct contact electric shock weapons are inherently cruel and degrading and that their manufacture, trade and use would constitute a violation of the UN Convention against Torture; and that while PESWs used at a distance could play a legitimate role in law enforcement as an alternative to firearms, they are also prone to abuse and should be subject to human rights-based trade controls. She described the "drive stun" mode of PESWs as "a de facto direct contact electric shock weapon" and argued for its discontinuation.

Amnesty International, along with a civil society network of over 80 NGOs, strongly supports these positions. Our network is advocating for a robust, global, Torture-Free Trade Treaty which would prohibit the production of and trade in inherently abusive law enforcement equipment, such as direct contact electric shock equipment; and establish effective human rights safeguards to control the trade in law enforcement equipment that could be misused for torture or other ill-treatment, such as PESWs.

It is essential that states support these initiatives and push for the creation of a new Torture-Free Trade Treaty. Such a treaty would close significant regulatory gaps by introducing global, legally-binding prohibitions and trade controls on law enforcement equipment used in the commission of torture or other ill-treatment – including all types of electric shock weapons and equipment.

A Torture-Free Trade Treaty could finally end the manufacture of, and trade in, inherently cruel and degrading law enforcement equipment such as direct contact electric shock equipment, further marginalising a policing practice that destroys lives and undermines international human rights law. It could also cast a much-needed spotlight on the increasing proliferation and availability of PESWs and compel states to take responsibility for this trade, so that this equipment is no longer supplied to police forces with poor records of compliance with international human rights law and standards on the use of force. A Torture-Free Trade Treaty is a vital component of international torture prevention strategies.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

TO STATES

- Prohibit the production, promotion, transfer and use of all direct contact electric shock weapons and equipment used for law enforcement including, but not limited to, stun guns, electric shock batons and shields, stun gloves, shock grabbing devices and body-worn electric shock devices (e.g. remotely controlled electric shock cuffs, vests and belts), as well as the provision of related technical assistance and/or training. States should also cease use of, decommission and destroy any stockpiles of such prohibited electric shock weapons within their territory or under their control.

- Prohibit the use of the direct contact "drive stun" mode on PESWs in all circumstances; require the removal of the "drive stun" mode from all future PESWs models and disable this function from models currently in circulation or remove them from use.

- Introduce strict, human-rights based trade controls on all transfers of PESWs, prohibiting their transfer where there is a clear risk that they will be used for torture or other ill-treatment. Competent authorities should consider a range of relevant factors in this assessment, including the recipient state's compliance with international human rights law and respect for the rule of law, and evidence of discrimination in the exercise of law enforcement or criminal justice functions in the recipient state.

- Publicly support and actively work towards the creation of a global, legally-binding instrument – a Torture-Free Trade Treaty – that would prohibit the production of and trade in inherently abusive law enforcement equipment, as well as related activities; and establish effective human rights safeguards to control the trade in law enforcement equipment that could be misused for torture or other ill-treatment.

- Establish new, or strengthen existing, national and regional production and trade controls on law enforcement equipment to bring them in line with the recommendations in the Special Rapporteur on Torture's thematic report on the torture trade and her annexed lists of prohibited and controlled law enforcement equipment.

TO COMPANIES

- All companies that manufacture, export, import, sell, or otherwise transfer PESWs should carry out human rights due diligence throughout their entire value chain and cease all transfers where there is a clear risk that the company's goods could be used for torture or other ill-treatment, irrespective of whether their home state licenses such transfers. They should also cease production, destroy any stocks of direct contact electric shock equipment designed for law enforcement and remove the "drive stun" mode from all PESW models.

METHODOLOGY

This briefing draws on research carried out by Amnesty International from 2014 to 2024 in over 40 countries in all regions where cases involving torture and other ill-treatment using electric shock equipment have been documented. Research includes verified visual evidence, witness testimonies, medical reports and judicial and administrative rulings. Survivors named by first names in single inverted commas are pseudonyms used to protect their identities. The briefing also includes additional cases documented in reports of country visits by the UN Sub-Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), research from other torture prevention civil society organizations and human rights NGOs, including Human Rights Watch, media reporting and relevant court cases.

Where available (principally in the UK and USA) the report cites use of force data, disaggregated by age and ethnic background, from police forces regarding the deployment of projectile electric shock weapons (PESWs) from the UK Home Office's Use of Force Statistics, Reuters Investigates USA Taser database, as well as peer-reviewed academic literature reviews. The Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol) and medical journal articles were used for information on the physical and psychological impacts of electric shock related abuses. Legal analysis is based on international human rights law and standards, including UN Convention against Torture and the UN Basic Principles on the use of Force and Firearms, as well as jurisprudence from international and regional human rights mechanisms, including the European Court of Human Rights.

DIFFICULTIES IDENTIFYING ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS AND DEVICES

The description of electric shock devices in existing research and reports is often imprecise. On many occasions the device is referred to generically, or by the brand name "TASER", which has become a shorthand for all electric shock devices. In some cases, available existing research indicates that the victim received electric shocks, without specifying whether this was from a makeshift, or specifically designed, device.

This vagueness obscures the critical distinctions between projectile electric shock devices (PESWs), direct contact electric shock weapons and makeshift devices, muddying appropriate policy recommendations. This lack of clarity is exacerbated in cases when PESWs are used for torture and other ill-treatment, as the reports often do not indicate whether the weapon was employed from a distance or was instead used in "drive stun" mode as a direct contact weapon. Visual guides now exist to help identify these devices with more precision.[1] The Istanbul Protocol recommends investigators identify the "type of current, device, number and shape of electrodes" for electric shock equipment.[2] In this report the use of "taser" in inverted commas (or without when within a quoted passage) signifies that the term is being used generically, and does not necessarily refer to products manufactured by Axon Enterprise, Inc. (Axon). When referring to Axon products, TASER is capitalized.

1 For example, Omega Research Foundation, *A Visual Guide to Military, Security & Police Equipment*, 2015, omegaresearchfoundation.org/storage/2024/05/Visual-Glossary-Introduction_English.pdf

2 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, (Istanbul Protocol), Professional Training Series No. 8/Rev. 2, 2022, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/2022-06-29/Istanbul-Protocol_Rev2_EN.pdf,p. 86.

The Omega Research Foundation provided original quantitative and qualitative research, as well as technical and policy analysis in relation to the production and trade in electric shock equipment and state regulation of such activities. Information on companies manufacturing or promoting electric shock weapons or equipment designed to be used for law enforcement was compiled by the Omega Research Foundation from a range of sources, including company websites, industry company directories, annual reports, investor press statements as well as the exhibitor listings of international arms and security fairs. Data related to trade and numbers of companies manufacturing or promoting electric shock equipment globally was drawn from the Omega Research Foundation's archives, the Special Rapporteur on Torture's thematic report on the trade in goods that can be used for torture or other ill-treatment, as well as Market Inside – a commercial database which aggregates international shipping data.[3]

This briefing is part of a larger body of work developed by Amnesty International, often in partnership with the Omega Research Foundation, examining the human rights risks of less lethal weapons, including previous investigations into the misuse of tear gas,[4] police batons,[5] kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs)[6] and the trade in less lethal weapons.[7] Complementary policy papers on chemical irritants, batons, KIPs and projectile electric shock weapons have been developed by Amnesty International Netherlands.[8] This work supports ongoing advocacy efforts to establish regulations on the manufacture and trade in less lethal weapons, at domestic, regional and international levels. The UN is currently considering adopting international standards in this area, with the possibility of developing a global legally-binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty.

Prior to publication, Amnesty International wrote to Axon Enterprise Inc., Eagle Commercial S.A. the March Group Ltd and Squad Group Ltd, outlining our main findings and inviting responses. Eagle Commercial S.A. and the March Group Ltd had not responded at the time of publication.
The responses of Axon Enterprise Inc. and Squad Group Ltd are reproduced in full in Annex 2.

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3 UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (UN Special Rapporteur on torture), Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 24 August 2023, UN Doc. A/78/324, Annex 3; Market Inside, dashboard.marketinsidedata.com

4 Amnesty International, *Tear Gas: an investigation*, teargas.amnesty.org

5 Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation, *Blunt Force: Investigating the misuse of police batons and related equipment*, amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2021/09/blunt-force/

6 Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation, *"My Eye Exploded" The Global Abuse of Kinetic Impact Projectiles*, (Index: 30/6384/2023), February 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/6384/2023/en/

7 Amnesty International, *The Repression Trade: Investigating the transfer of weapons used to crush dissent*, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2023/10/repression-trade/

8 Amnesty International, Chemical Irritants in Law Enforcement: an Amnesty International Position Paper, June 2021, amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2021/07/Amnesty-position-paper-chemical-irritants.pdf; Batons and other Handheld Kinetic Impact Weapons: an Amnesty International Position Paper, March 2022, amnesty.nl/content/ uploads/2022/06/Position-paper-striking-weapons-final.pdf?x49845; Kinetic Impact Projectiles in Law Enforcement: an Amnesty International Position Paper, March 2023, www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2023/03/Amnesty-position-paper-kinetic-impact-projectiles.pdf; Projectile electric-shock weapons: An Amnesty International position paper, February 2019, www.amnesty.nl/ai_position_paper_pesws

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Electric shock devices have long been used for torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (ill-treatment) across the world, often using makeshift methods, such as cattle prods and wires connected to the mains or car batteries. A particularly prevalent early device was the portable field telephone. Hand-cranked "magneto" or "dynamo" field telephones were first used for torture by the French military in Indo-China and the Japanese *Kempeitai* (military police) across imperial Japan in the 1930s. After World War II, the field telephone was used for torture throughout colonial France from Algeria to Madagascar, in British colonial Kenya, as well as by the US marines in Vietnam.[9] At the same time, direct contact electric shock weapons specifically designed for law enforcement were emerging in the USA with crowd control batons and with the Argentine police's early adoption of the *picana eléctrica* (electric baton) in the 1930s, a device which would spread to Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, as electric shock related torture became widely adopted across Latin America under the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s.[10]

THE TASER

(AN ACRONYM FOR TOM A. SWIFT ELECTRIC RIFLE)

MANUFACTURED BY TASER INTERNATIONAL (NOW AXON ENTERPRISE, INC.) EMERGED AS A LEADING BRAND WITH VARIOUS MODELS NOW INCREASINGLY USED BY POLICE FORCES ACROSS THE WORLD.

Since the 1970s, the market for direct contact electric shock weapons specifically designed for and promoted to law enforcement has evolved and expanded. Today, there are hundreds of different products, ranging from stun guns to electric shock batons and shields to body-worn electric shock devices, including ankle cuffs, vests and belts.[11] The 1970s saw the development of Projectile Electric Shock Weapons (PESWs)[12] which could be used as both a stand-off weapon and a direct contact electric shock device, and which began to be introduced into law enforcement in the USA in the 1980s. The TASER (an acronym for Tom A. Swift Electric Rifle) manufactured by Taser International (now Axon Enterprise, Inc.) emerged as a leading brand with various models now increasingly used by police forces across the world.[13]

9 Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy*, Princetown Press, 2007.

10 Darius Rejali, "Electricity: The Global History of a Torture Technology", Reed College, www.reed.edu/poli_sci/faculty/rejali/articles/History_of_Electric_Torture.html

11 Omega Research Foundation, Electric Shock Weapons, omegaresearchfoundation.org/what-we-do/electric-shock/

12 Also known as Conducted Energy Devices (CED), Conducted Energy or Electrical Weapon (CEW), Electric Discharge Weapon (EDW), Electronic Control Weapon (ECW), or simply by the brand name "TASER".

13 Axon, *Brand Statistics*, www.axon.com/taser-brand-statistics According to Axon, more than 18,000 police forces in over 80 countries deploying Taser, with over 960,000 Tasers in service globally.

Amnesty International conference on the abolition of torture held in Paris in December 1973. Amnesty International played a leading role in the eventual adoption of the UN Convention Against Torture just over a decade later, on 10 December 1984. © Amnesty International

1.2 DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK RELATED TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Amnesty International has been documenting cases of direct contact electric shock related torture and other ill-treatment for over 50 years. In 1973, Amnesty International released a global assessment - *A Report on Torture* – which began the process of discussions and debates that would eventually lead to the adoption of the UN Convention Against Torture just over a decade later, on 10 December 1984. The report contained many cases of electric shock related torture against students, political opponents, ethnic groups and criminal suspects in Argentina, Belgium, Burundi, Cameroon, Chile, Ethiopia, Greece, Indonesia, Israel, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, Senegal, South Africa, Syria, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, Venezuela, Vietnam and Zambia.[14] Since then, Amnesty International has regularly published reports on electric shock equipment,[15] body-worn electric shock equipment,[16] and the abuse of law enforcement equipment in general which have been featuring multiple cases of direct contact electric shock related abuses in all regions.[17]

14 Amnesty International, *Report on Torture* (Index: ACT 40/001/1973), 1 January 1973, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act40/001/1973/en/

15 *Arming the torturers: Electro-shock torture and the spread of stun technology* (Index: ACT 40/001/1997), 4 March 1997, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act40/001/1997/en/

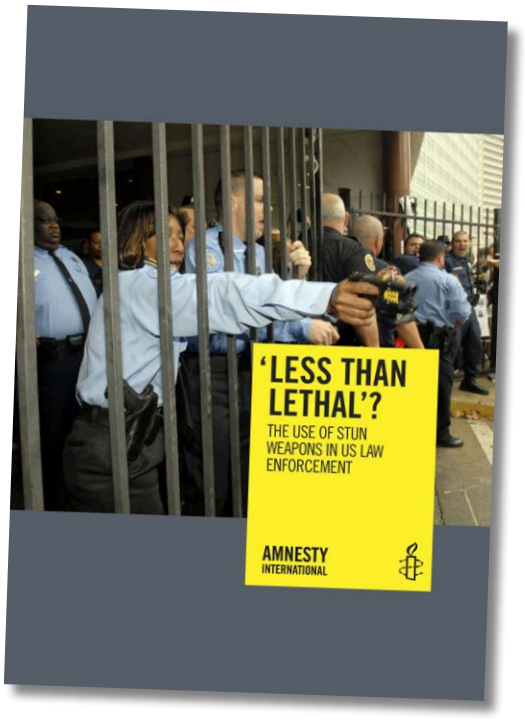
16 Amnesty International, *USA: Cruelty in control? the stun belt and other electro-shock equipment in law enforcement* (Index: AMR 51/054/1999), 7 June 1999, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR51/054/1999/en/

17 Amnesty International, *Pain Merchants: Security equipment and its use in torture and other ill-treatment* (Index: ACT 40/008/2003), 2 December 2003, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act40/008/2003/en/; Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation, *China's trade in tools of torture and repression* (Index: ASA 17/042/2014), 23 September 2014, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/042/2014/en/; Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation, *Tackling the trade in tools of torture and execution technologies* (Index Number: ACT 30/6998/2017), 18 September 2017, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/6998/2017/en/; Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation, *Ending the Torture Trade: the path to global controls on the 'Tools of Torture'*, (Index: ACT 30/3363/2020), 11 December 2020, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/3363/2020/en/

1.3 PROJECTILE ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS

In the 2000s, Amnesty International released a series of reports which documented deaths, as well as torture or other ill-treatment, involving police use of PESWs in the USA and Canada.[18] While there has been ongoing controversy surrounding the precise causes of death in TASER-related incidents, Amnesty International compiled over 500 cases of deaths which occurred following TASER use from 2001-12.[19]

In 2017, Amnesty International published a critique of a Dutch police pilot introduction of the TASER X2 which identified fundamental failings, including extensive use of the direct contact "drive stun" mode, insufficient training, weak accountability and use in mental health institutions. The report called on the Dutch police to suspend the use of TASER weapons by all police units until a legal and operational framework for their use had been set up that is in line with international human rights law and standards.[20]



Amnesty International's 'Less than Lethal'? report published in 2008, one of several reports examining the misuse of TASERs in the USA in the 2000s © Amnesty International

ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS AND DEVICES[21]

A wide range of electric shock devices are manufactured and promoted for use by law enforcement across the world. These can be divided into direct contact electric shock equipment, such as electric shock batons/shields and body-worn electric shock devices, and projectile electric shock weapons (PESWs).

18 Amnesty International, *Canada: Inappropriate and excessive use of tasers*, (Index: AMR 20/002/2007), May 2007, www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AMR200022007ENGLISH.pdf; *USA: Excessive and lethal force? Amnesty International's concerns about deaths and ill-treatment involving police use of taser* (Index: AMR 51/139/2004), November 2004, www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/amr511392004en.pdf; Amnesty International, '*Less Than Lethal'? The Use of Stun Weapons in US Law Enforcement* (Index: AMR 51/010/2008), 10 October 2008, www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/amr510102008en.pdf

19 Amnesty International, "USA: Stricter limits urged as deaths following police Taser use reach 500", 15 February 2012, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pre01/083/2012/en/ An extensive study carried out by Reuters compiled a database of over 1,000 cases of deaths following TASER use from 1983-2018; in 153 cases, the TASER was established to be a cause or contributing factor. Nine in 10 of those who died following TASER use were unarmed and one in four suffered from mental illness or neurological disorders, Reuters Investigates, *Shock Tactics*, www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-taser-database/

20 Amnesty International, *A Failed Experiment: The Taser-Pilot of the Dutch Police*, February 2018, www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2018/02/A-Failed-Experiment_The-Taser-pilot-of-the-Dutch-Police.pdf?x25503

21 This report addresses electric shock weapons and devices used for law enforcement, not electric shock devices used for personal protection by private individuals.

DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS AND DEVICES

Electric shock stun guns/batons/shields: A range of battery-powered equipment, from hand-held stun guns and batons, to shields, which deliver painful electric shocks via two or more electrodes in direct contact with an individual. New devices that have been developed and internationally marketed to law enforcement agencies include electric shock gloves and electric shock capture devices. Some direct contact electric shock weapons include built-in chemical irritant sprays, or sound or light devices. Voltage and amperage vary between models, as does the power and duration of the electric shock delivered.

Range of direct contact electric shock weapons on display at an Asian security exhibition © Omega Research Foundation

Body-worn electric shock devices: Battery-powered body-worn electric shock devices, such as cuffs, sleeves, vests, or belts which are operated by remote control. The electric shock causes severe pain and causes muscles to contract involuntarily, rendering the targeted individual immobile. Other physical effects can include muscular weakness, involuntary urination and defecation (when device is worn around the waist), heartbeat irregularities, seizures, and welts on the skin. The person holding the remote control can easily abuse the target individual by delivering multiple or continuous shocks. These devices can also be activated accidentally. Wearing the device with the continuous threat of receiving a painful electric shock can cause profound mental suffering to the targeted individual. Their use is inherently degrading and invariably leads to acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.[22]

An electric shock stun belt promoted by a South African company © Omega Research Foundation

22 UN Committee against Torture, Reports: Twenty-third session (8-19 November 1999) Twenty-fourth session (1-19 May 2000), UN Doc. A/55/44, digitallibrary.un.org/record/424485/files/A_55_44-EN.pdf?ln=en, para. 180 (c); see also CPT, Electrical discharge weapons (extract from the 20th General Report of the CPT), CPT/Inf (2010)28-part, para. 74.

PROJECTILE ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS (PESWs)

PESWs – sometimes referred to as "tasers" – are small, usually pistol-shaped, weapons with one or more cartridges containing two darts (or probes) attached to thin insulated copper wires. These darts are fired –using compressed nitrogen or a small pyrotechnic charge – at a targeted individual up to 13.7 metres away in the latest models. When the barbs connect with the target's skin or clothing they deliver a high voltage, low amperage electric shock intended to induce a neuromuscular incapacitation, i.e. to cause the targeted individual to lose muscle control. Almost all models can also be used in direct contact – known as the "drive stun" mode - by pressing the weapon's electrodes against the subject to deliver intense, localized pain, rather than neuromuscular incapacitation. In this mode the PESW effectively becomes a direct contact electric shock device.[23]

Axon's latest PESW model, the TASER 10, which, unlike its previous models, does not have the "drive stun" mode © Omega Research Foundation

1.4 HEALTH EFFECTS

DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS

The use of electric shock devices for torture and other ill-treatment causes profound physical and psychological effects, and in some cases, even death. While some devices, depending on how they are used, may leave no enduring physical marks as evidence, prolonged use of high voltage/low amperage direct contact electric shock weapons can leave lesions consistent with burns resulting in hyperpigmented scarring. Convulsions caused by the electric shock may produce dislocations and fractures, or secondary injuries such as bites to tongue, gums or lips, as well as muscle spasms and cramps.[24] Electric shocks to the genitals "are intended to cause maximum humiliation and cruelty" and should be considered as "sexual torture".[25] Survivors of electric shock related abuses have described severe pain, loss of muscle control, convulsions, fainting, and involuntary defecation and urination, along with long-term, debilitating psychological effects including intrusive, traumatic thoughts and insomnia.[26]

23 Axon's TASER 10 model, released in January 2023, does not have the "drive stun" feature available on previous models, www.axon.com/products/taser-10.

24 OHCHR, Istanbul Protocol, Electric shock torture (previously cited), pp. 106-7.

25 UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Interim report, 18 July 2024, UN Doc. A/79/181, para. 22. The quotes refer to various forms of "sexual torture" including electrocution. See also OHCHR, Istanbul Protocol, p. 54 (h).

26 Amnesty International, *Arming the Torturers: Electro-shock Torture and the Spread of Stun Technology* (Index: ACT 40/001/1997), 4 March 1997, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT40/001/1997/en/

PROJECTILE ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS (PESWs)

PESWs carry specific health risks involving serious injuries and even death following discharge. A peer reviewed meta-study of 71 papers on the health effects of PESWs summarized case studies relating to dart penetration, electrical discharge and muscle contraction. These include dart lacerations and penetration of the skull, eye, internal organs, throat, fingers and testis; electrical discharge induced burns, seizures and arrythmias; and a variety of injuries and deaths from falls. There have also been several cases of the use of PESWs igniting flammable liquids or other substances.[27]

Health risks are elevated with use against vulnerable groups, including children, pregnant women, people who use drugs and older people. Regarding children, for instance, the UK Defence Scientific Advisory Council Sub-Committee on the Medical Implications of Less-Lethal Weapons (DOMILL) found that children (and thin adults) may be at greater risk of organ, brain and eye injury from penetrating barbs because of their short stature and thinner body walls.[28] There are heightened risks of cardiac arrythmias when PESWs are used on people with underlying heart conditions, older people, as well as those under the effect of drugs or alcohol.[29]

Axon, which manufactures the most widely used PESW, TASER, warns that "cardiac capture may be more likely in children and thin adults" and that "serious complications could also arise in those with impaired heart function or in those with an implanted cardiac pacemaker or defibrillator." Axon also cautions that injuries are "more likely to occur in people with pre-existing injuries, orthopedic hardware, conditions or special susceptibilities, including pregnancy, low bone density, spinal injury, or previous muscle, disc, ligament, joint, bone or tendon damage or surgery. Such injuries may also occur in drive-stun applications or when a person reacts to the CEW [Conducted Energy Weapon] deployment by making a rapid or unexpected movement."[30]

Axon, which manufactures the most widely used PESW, TASER, warns that "cardiac capture may be more likely in children and thin adults" and that "serious complications could also arise in those with impaired heart function or in those with an implanted cardiac pacemaker or defibrillator."

27 Marie Brasholt and others, *Health impact of electric discharge weapons, a review of case studies*, Torture, 2024, 34(1), pp. 48-61, tidsskrift.dk/torture-journal/issue/view/10998/2231

28 Defence Scientific Advisory Council Sub-Committee on the Medical Implications of Less-Lethal Weapons, (DOMILL), Statement on the Medical Implications of Use of the Taser X26 and M26 Less-Lethal Systems on Children and Vulnerable Adults, 4 April 2011 (amended 27 January 2012), assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f3224ed915d74e33f4ebc/DOMILL14_20120127_TASER06.2.pdf

29 DOMILL, Statement on the Medical Implications of Use of the Taser X26 and M26 Less-Lethal Systems on Children and Vulnerable Adults, 4 April 2011 (previously cited).

30 Axon, "Instructor and Operator: Warnings, Risks & Release Agreement", 1 March 2023, my.axon.com/sfc/servlet.shepherd/document/download/069Do0000057MXYIA2?operationContext=S1

2. THE USE OF DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS

> ***"There was a bag with instruments. Batons, pliers for ripping the nails off, needles, electric shocker, stapler for the ear. […] There is a set of instruments in each police station, in some stations they [the instruments] are in the safe."***
>
> Former employee of the Ministry of Interior, Tajikistan, 202431

INTRODUCTION

The use of direct contact electric shock weapons, such as stun guns, shock batons, and PESWs in direct contact mode has been documented on the street, at borders, in migrant and refugee detention centres, in police stations and in prisons. These inhumane devices have been used against protesters, women and girls - including pregnant women - children, students, political opponents, human rights defenders, lawyers and prisoners of war for threats, punishment, forced confessions and other coercion.

Direct contact electric shock weapons and devices deliver painful shocks at the press of a button often leaving no visible trace. They have no legitimate law enforcement role that could not be achieved through less harmful means.[32] Amnesty International considers the effects of these devices to be inherently cruel, inhuman and degrading and has long called for their production, promotion, trade and use to be prohibited, a position also adopted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.[33]

As the cases below illustrate, direct contact electric shock equipment has often been used in conjunction with other law enforcement equipment such as batons, pepper spray and restraints, and torture techniques including waterboarding, stress positions, sexual violence, hooding and mock executions. All parts of the body, including the most sensitive areas, such as genitalia, the inner thighs, palms of hands, soles of feet, the teeth, ears and face, have been subject to electric shocks. Survivors have suffered burns, numbness, miscarriage, urinary disfunction, insomnia, exhaustion and profound psychological trauma.

31 Amnesty International, *Tajikistan: Reprisals against Pamiri Minority Suppression of Local Identity, Clampdown on All Dissent*, (Index: EUR 60/8413/2024), 2024, eurasia.amnesty.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/tajikistan-reprisals-against-pamiri-minority-24aug24-1.pdf pp. 36-37.

32 Amnesty International, *Projectile Electric-Shock Weapons: A Position Paper* (PESWs: Position Paper), Section 2.3.2., pp. 16-17, www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2019/03/AI_position_paper_pesws_extended.pdf

33 UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report, UN Doc. A/78/324 (previously cited), para. 54.

Different types of Chinese-manufactured electric shock stun batons on display at a security equipment trade fair
© Omega Research Foundation

The use of direct contact electric shock weapons to inflict torture and other ill-treatment continues across the world.[34] According to a peer-reviewed meta-analysis of 266 studies involving 103,604 individuals published in October 2023, torture was reported in 105 countries; within this data set, electric shock was the second most common method of torture after blunt trauma, reported in 114 studies and 28 countries.[35]

2.1 USE AGAINST DETAINEES

Direct contact electric shock weapons and equipment have been used extensively in police custody, in prison systems, against prisoners of war and other custodial settings to torture or otherwise ill-treat detainees across all regions. The following cases are drawn from research conducted by Amnesty International and other civil society organizations, as well as the UN and regional torture prevention bodies from 2014 to 2024. The severity of these cases underlines the urgent need to prohibit the manufacture and trade of direct contact devices and to remove the "drive stun" function from PESWs.

34 See, for example, Amnesty International Annual Report, *The State of the World's Human Rights: 2024*, (Index: POL 10/7200/2024), 23 April 2024, pp. 157, 203, 235, 319, 364.

35 Andrew Milewski and others, *Reported Methods, Distributions, and Frequencies of Torture Globally: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, JAMA Network Open, 6(10), 3 October 2023, jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2809990

Detainees walking through a narrow, fenced enclosure in an internment camp in western China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
© Molly Crabapple

ASIA

In interviews conducted between October 2019 and May 2021, former detainees in internment camps in western China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region told Amnesty International that guards were equipped with electric shock batons which they often used for torture or other forms of ill-treatment.[36] 'Madi'[37] said that he was beaten shortly after arriving at the camp when he resisted being strip-searched by guards: "When I said I wouldn't take off my underwear they beat me with an electric baton. And then I fell. They beat me and I was electrocuted… When I came to my senses, they took off my clothes, they searched me, made me bend down, tied my hands behind my neck. It was very painful." Another former detainee, 'Mansur', a farmer, described being repeatedly shocked because he would not sit still in the classroom. Detainees were also shocked by batons for not being able to recite content in standard Mandarin.[38]

In Tajikistan, Amnesty International has documented the use of direct contact electric shock weapons in detention in the context of ongoing discriminatory treatment of the country's Pamiri minority communities in the mountainous east. Survivors interviewed by Amnesty International described being coerced to sign "confessions," or to make incriminating statements in public through the use of hammers to crush fingers, placement of needles under nails, electric shocks and sleep deprivation, among other methods. An individual who had worked in the Ministry of Interior described frequent use of electric shock related torture and other ill-treatment, and reported that: "There was a bag with instruments. Batons, pliers for ripping the nails off, needles, electric shocker, stapler for the ear. […] There is a set of instruments in each police station, in some stations they [the instruments] are in the safe."[39]

36 Amnesty International, *"Like We Were Enemies in a War": China's Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang*, (Index: ASA 17/4137/2021), 2021, xinjiang.amnesty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ASA_17_4137-2021_Full_report_ENG.pdf
37 A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of interviewees.
38 Amnesty International, *"Like We Were Enemies in a War"* (previously cited) , pp. 102-3. 'Mansur' is a pseudonym.
39 Amnesty International, *Tajikistan: Reprisals against Pamiri Minority* (previously cited), pp. 36-37.

Electric shock related torture and other forms of ill-treatment in detention has also been documented in Azerbaijan,[40] Kazakhstan,[41] Thailand[42] and Mongolia.[43]

EUROPE

In the summer of 2021, migrants and refugees attempted to cross the Belarusian border with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, triggering an often violent and repressive pushback at the border. In Latvia, border guards used "tasers" to attack and punish migrants and refugees who posed no threat. 'Zaki', a man from Iraq, reported that he was detained inside a van with a group of migrants and refugees, where Latvian border guards "used electricity, like electric shock. They used it on my shoulder, back. They were using it freely, whatever part was close to them, biceps, hands etc."[44]

Refugees and migrants also faced threats and intimidation in detention centres. During a raid on the Medininkai detention centre in Lithuania on 2 March 2022, one detainee from Sub-Saharan Africa said: "I was lying on the ground and still they have used tasers on me three times, and at the same time they beat me with the batons." Another described being threatened by police officers who placed a "taser" on her forehead, telling her "'Shut up or I will shoot you!'"[45] The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) reported that in the aftermath of a demonstration against poor conditions in a temporary camp for migrants and refugees, "security forces had used electric-discharge weapons (EDW) on them [detained foreigners] after the calm was restored and they had been placed in cuffs inside a container.[46] In July 2018, Axon announced sales of 100 X26Ps TASERs (which feature a direct contact mode) for the Lithuanian border force.[47] TASER is now widely issued to Lithuanian police forces, meaning Axon products may be directly linked to alleged human rights violations against migrants and refugees.

'Ayoub' from Lebanon who was detained in the Polish detention centre in Wędrzyn reported being subjected to hours of physical abuse, including beatings and "taser" shocks: "They took all my clothes off and started beating me and punching my head. They said that I had to sign the document and threatened me with deportation. When I refused, they used tasers. This continued for hours. I was in pain and completely exhausted. I finally signed the document and they put me on a bus to Warsaw."[48]

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40 European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (henceforth CPT), Report to the Azerbaijani Government on the visit to Azerbaijan carried out by the CPT from 29 March to 8 April 2016, 18 July 2018, hudoc.cpt.coe.int/eng?i=p-aze-20160329-en-9, para. 19: allegations of electric shock and truncheon blows on the soles of the feet and suffocation.

41 Kazakstan National Preventive Mechanism, *Consolidated Report of the National Preventive Mechanism members on the preventive visits made in 2018*, 2019, atlas-of-torture.org/en/entity/wwhf00oaa09?searchTerm=Kazakhstan%20NPM%202020/ p. 83: "They beat him with electric current from electric shocker on his hands, on his legs, on his body and on his genitals."

42 Amnesty International, *"Make him speak by tomorrow": Torture and other ill-treatment in Thailand*, (Index: ASA 39/4747/2016), 28 September, 2016, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/4747/2016/en/, pp. 39, 44: references to torture using electric shock to ears, inside nostril, collar bone and lips; and to use of "flashlight" shock baton to genitals.

43 Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Visit to Mongolia undertaken from 11 to 20 September 2017: observations and recommendations addressed to the State party, UN doc. CAT/OP/MNG/1, 19 December 2018, /tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FOP%2FMNG%2F1&Lang=en, para. 34: use of electric shocks for obtaining confessions and locating items of evidence.

44 Amnesty International, *Latvia: Return home or never leave the woods: Refugees and migrants arbitrarily detained, beaten and coerced into "voluntary" returns*, (Index: EUR 52/5913/2022), 12 October 2022 www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur52/5913/2022/en/, p. 33. 'Zaki' is a pseudonym.

45 Amnesty International. *Lithuania: Forced out or locked up – Refugees and migrants abused and abandoned*, (Index: EUR 53/5735/2022), 27 June 2022, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur53/5735/2022/en/, p. 38.

46 CPT, *Report to the Lithuanian Government on the periodic visit to Lithuania carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 10 to 20 December 2021*, CPT/Inf (2023) 01, 23 February 2023, /rm.coe.int/1680aa51af, p. 42, para. 97.

47 Axon, "Axon Announces Orders for 10,113 TASER Smart Weapons", 12 July 2018, investor.axon.com/2018-07-12-Axon-Announces-Orders-for-10,113-TASER-Smart-Weapons

48 Amnesty International, "Poland: Cruelty not compassion, at Europe's other borders", 11 April 2022, www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EUR3754602022ENGLISH.pdf, p. 12. 'Ayoub' is a pseudonym.

Other cases of use of direct contact electric shock weapons have been documented against detainees in Montenegro,[49] Poland,[50] Serbia,[51] Turkey[52] and Ukraine,[53] and against migrants and refugees in Italy.[54] Migrants and refugees have also been subject to direct contact electric shock outside of Europe in Mexico,[55] Saudia Arabia,[56] Laos,[57] and Tunisia.[58]

> ***"They took all my clothes off and started beating me and punching my head. They said that I had to sign the document and threatened me with deportation. When I refused, they used tasers. This continued for hours. I was in pain and completely exhausted. I finally signed the document and they put me on a bus to Warsaw."***
>
> 'Ayoub' from Lebanon who was detained in the Polish detention centre in Wędrzyn

AMERICAS

The 2024 UN Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela documented allegations of torture and other ill-treatment committed against political opponents in detention, including the use of electric shock equipment.[59] These included the case of a student leader who was arrested on 30 August 2023 and, on the same day, "was beaten and given electric shocks to his genitals and other parts of his body to force him to implicate various trade union leaders, politicians and journalists in illegal acts".[60]

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49 CPT, *Report to the Government of Montenegro on the visit to Montenegro carried out by the CPT from 9 to 16 October 2017*, CPT/Inf (2019) 2, 7 February 2019, /hudoc.cpt.coe.int/eng?i=p-mne-20171009-en-6, para. 11: use of hand-held electrical discharge devices to administer electric shocks to coerce suspects to admit to certain offences in the pre-investigation; Amnesty International. *The State of the World's Human Rights 2021*, (Index: POL 10/3202/20212021), 7 April 2021, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/3202/2021/en/, p. 250: The State Prosecutor failed to effectively investigate allegations that police used torture, including electric shocks, in May/June to extract "confessions" from two suspects and a witness in two bombing cases.

50 CPT, *Report to the Polish Government on the visit to Poland carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 11 to 22 May 2017,* 27 November 2017, hudoc.cpt.coe.int/eng?i=p-pol-20170511-en-6, para. 15: "allegations referred to *excessive use of force* at the time of apprehension (consisting of slaps, punches, kicks, truncheon blows, using an electric discharge weapon and applying handcuffs too tightly)".

51 CPT, *Report to the Government of Serbia on the visit to Serbia carried out by the CPT from 31 May to 7 June 2017*, CPT/Inf (2018) 22, 21 June 2018, /rm.coe.int/16808b5ee7, para. 11: use of an electro-shock device by police officers to force confessions.

52 CPT, *Report to the Turkish Government on the visit to Turkey carried out by the CPT from 10 to 23 May 2017*, CPT/Inf (2020) 22, 5 August 2020, hudoc.cpt.coe.int/eng?i=p-tur-20170510-en-6 "Some detained persons alleged that electric shocks had been inflicted upon them by police officers with body-contact shock devices."

53 OHCHR, *Treatment of Prisoners of War and Persons Hors De Combat in the Context of the Armed Attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine: 24 February 2022 – 23 February 2023*, 24 March 2023, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2023/23-03-24-Ukraine-thematic-report-POWs-ENG.pdf, paras 32, 59, 62, 80, 94, 97: electric shock torture by "tasers" used against genitalia, as well as the use of TA-57 military telephones.

54 Amnesty International, *Hotspot Italy: How EU's flagship approach leads to violations of refugee and migrant rights*, p 2; pp. 17-21: multiple allegations of the use of electric shock batons in the commission of torture.

55 Human Rights Watch, "Mexico: Free Detained Migrants Amid Pandemic", 14 April 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/14/mexico-free-detained-migrants-amid-pandemic, crackdown on protests in detention centres involving "hoses, tasers, teargas, and nightsticks".

56 Amnesty International, *"This is worse than Covid-19" Ethiopians abandoned and abused in Saudi prisons*, (Index: MDE 23/3125/2020), 2020, Ethiopian migrants in Jizan Central Prison and in Jeddah Prison: "They used this electric device. I had a red mark on my back. It made a small hole on my clothes. I saw a man whose nose and mouth were bleeding after that. Since then, we don't complain anymore because we're afraid they'll do again the electric thing on our back. We keep quiet". www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2020-09/Report.pdf?ofpXkfgKj_IEX2E2UrWjxmp_ZcloJYda=, p. 15.

57 Amnesty International, The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024, (Index: POL 10/7200/2024), 23 April 2024,www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/, p. 235; reports of victims of human trafficking being held in travel debt bondage and subjected to harsh working conditions, including physical punishments such as electric shocks.

58 Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: No Safe Haven for Black African Migrants, Refugees", 19 July 2023, www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/19/tunisia-no-safe-haven-black-african-migrants-refugees, Black African migrants, refugees allege abuse: "Two [other uniformed officers] gave us shocks with electronic devices like tasers".

59 UN Independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Report, UN doc. A/HRC/57/57, 17 September 2024, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session57/advance-versions/a-hrc-57-57-en.pdf, paras 84-5, 96.

60 UN Independent international fact-finding mission (previously cited), para. 9

In September 2020, in Colombia, a 44-year-old lawyer was filmed being repeatedly shocked using a TASER X2 in "drive stun" mode for approximately five minutes as he lay immobilized on the ground. He, along with bystanders, pleaded for police officers to stop. He was later detained and severely beaten, subsequently dying of blunt force injuries.[61] His death sparked widespread protests in Bogotá and other cities marred by violence and further human rights violations.

THE USE OF PESWs IN DIRECT CONTACT "DRIVE STUN" MODE

The "drive stun" mode on PESWs works in a fundamentally different way to the projectile electric shock function. Because the two points of contact of the weapon that are releasing the electric current are too close to each other to complete an electric circuit, this mode will not cause neuro-muscular contraction and the concomitant incapacitation. It relies on obtaining the individual's compliance through the extreme pain it causes, amounting to a form of torture or other ill-treatment.

The Special Rapporteur on Torture has described the "drive stun" mode of PESWs as "a de facto direct contact electric shock weapon" and argued for its discontinuation.[62] The Committee against Torture expressed concern about "the frequent use of the so-called "stun mode", which is intended only to inflict pain"[63] and recommended that their "use in drive stun mode" should be prohibited.[64] The cruelty and potentially counter-productive nature of the "drive stun" mode is evident from Axon's own instructions on use on the TASER X26P model: "Simply "touching" the energy weapon against the subject is not sufficient. The subject is likely to recoil and try to get away from the energy weapon. It is necessary to aggressively drive the front of the CEW [Conducted Energy Weapon] into the subject for maximum effect".[65] In many situations the "drive stun" mode is used on people who are already restrained or effectively detained.

PESW "drive stun" mode continues to be used around the world: the Royal Canadian Mounted Police recorded 329 uses in "contact mode" between 2020 and 2022; the UK registered 130 "drive stun" uses from April 2020 - March 2024; with the Netherlands recording 68 "drive stun" instances in 2022-23, (although this included a decline of 40% in 2023).[66] The TASER 10, Axon's most recent model, does not have a "drive stun" mode.[67] Axon told Amnesty International that "this decision reflects our commitment to enhancing the safety and effectiveness of our products, and prioritizing de-escalation and minimal force without causing undue harm."[68]

61 Amnesty International, "Colombia: Amnesty International condemns torture and excessive use of force by police", 11 September 2020, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/colombia-amnistia-condena-tortura-uso-excesivo-fuerza/

62 UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report (previously cited), para. 54; Annex 1, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/annex-i-document-august-2023-ae-18-09-23.pdf

63 Committee against Torture, Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the Netherlands, UN Doc. CAT/C/NLD/CO/7,18 December 2018, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/442/89/pdf/g1844289.pdf, para. 42.

64 Committee against Torture, concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CAT/C/GBR/CO/6), 7 June 2019, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/154/71/pdf/g1915471.pdf, para. 29.

65 Axon, TASER X26P Operation: "Drive-stun backup", my.axon.com/s/article/Drive-stun-backup-x26p?language=en_US

66 RCMP, Police Intervention Options Reports 2020-22, rcmp.ca/en/corporate-information/publications-and-manuals/2022-police-intervention-options-report#c11; www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/transparenc/police-info-policieres/intervention/2021/index-eng.htm; www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/transparenc/police-info-policieres/intervention/2020/index-eng.htm; UK Home Office, Police use of force statistics, England and Wales, www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-use-of-force-statistics; Politie, *Geweldsaanwendingen door politieambtenaren 2023*, p. 15, 20240418-definitieve-versie-1.0-gdpa-rapportage-2023.pdf.

67 Axon, TASER 10, www.axon.com/products/taser-10

68 Axon, Letter to Amnesty International, February 2025, on file, see Annex 2.

On 2 December 2023, an Alabama state police officer from Reform Police Department was videoed discharging a TASER in "drive stun" mode into the back of a 24-year-old Black man, who was handcuffed, bent over the hood of the police squad car and crying out in pain.[69] In response to the incident, which prompted widespread condemnation, Alabama State Senator Merika Coleman proposed a Bill entitled "Use of force; use of tasers prohibited in certain circumstances" which would explicitly prohibit the use of tasers "on individuals who are restrained or otherwise unable to resist, such as when an individual has been placed in handcuffs, body cuffs, or other restraining devices".[70] The Bill was not approved and deemed formally "dead" on 5 September 2024.[71]

Torture and other forms of ill-treatment using direct contact electric shock has also been documented in Ecuador,[72] and Nicaragua.[73]

AFRICA

According to Human Rights Watch, in the run-up to and aftermath of the Ugandan elections in January 2021, Ugandan security forces – including the police and the military – arbitrarily detained opposition supporters, held them in unauthorized detention centres and subjected them to torture and other ill-treatment. One detainee described how he was tortured multiple times through stress positions, beatings and electric shocks from an unspecified device on his feet for several days.[74]

In 2019, BBC Africa Eye spoke to a former Nigerian police officer who said he had witnessed torture and other forms of ill-treatment in Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) police stations involving the repeated use of electric shock batons in combination with beatings on detainees tied to chairs. He said: "They use a shocker and it sparks 'prrr'. When that thing touches you, you feel the shock everywhere, even inside your brain. Sometimes they use two of these machines and also beat them with a club… People are beaten and electrocuted at the same time."[75]

69 CNN, "Alabama officer on leave after video shows her using stun gun on handcuffed Black man", 9 December 2023, edition.cnn.com/2023/12/09/us/reform-alabama-police-stun-gun-man/index.html

70 Bill Track 50, AL SB16: Use of force; use of tasers prohibited in certain circumstances, Summary, www.billtrack50.com/billdetail/1689595

71 Bill Track 50, AL SB16 (previously cited).

72 Human Rights Watch, "Letter to President Noboa on "internal armed conflict" and human rights violations in Ecuador", 22 May 2024, www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/22/letter-president-noboa-internal-armed-conflict-and-human-rights-violations-ecuador, "cases of beatings, use of teargas, electric shocks, sexual violence and deaths at the hands of soldiers".

73 OHCHR, Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in Nicaragua 18 April – 18 August 2018, August 2018 www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/NI/HumanRightsViolationsNicaraguaApr_Aug2018_EN.pdf para. 80: allegations of "burnings with Taser guns and/or cigarettes, use of barbed wires, beatings with fists and tubes and attempted strangulation".

74 Human Rights Watch, "*I Only Need Justice" Unlawful Detention and Abuse in Unauthorized Places of Detention in Uganda*", www.hrw.org/report/2022/03/22/i-only-need-justice/unlawful-detention-and-abuse-unauthorized-places-detention, p. 42.

75 BBC Africa Eye, "Torture 'rampant' among Nigeria's security forces," 10 February 2020,www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-51419440, timecode: 9:00-45.

In South Africa, electric shock batons and shields have been documented being used in the prison system.[76] In August 2023, the South Gauteng High Court in Johannesburg found the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services liable for the plaintiffs' damages arising from acts of assaults and torture inflicted by prison officials on five inmates of the Leeuwkop Maximum Correctional Centre in Gauteng.[77] The incidents, which took place in 2014, included multiple acts of torture using electric shock shields and beatings with batons. According to a medical expert witness, one of the inmates suffered loss of feeling in his left upper and lower limb and urinary dysfunction caused by "muscle contortions" and "neurological damage" due to "the sustained use of electric shock equipment".[78] The use of direct contact electric shock has also been reported in Cameroon,[79] Somalia,[80] Chad,[81] Guinea,[82] and Mali.[83]

MENA

In Syria, Amnesty International has documented widespread use of torture and other ill-treatment against detainees held in prisons run by the Autonomous Authorities of the North and East Syria Region, which were set up in the wake of the defeat of Islamic State. This includes electric shock, along with sexual violence, beatings and stress positions. [84] One case involved a 42-year-old man who was transferred to a detention centre in Baghdad in Iraq, where his sister said that he was subjected to daily torture for one month, including by electric shocks with "tasers", before he finally gave a forced confession that he was affiliated with IS.[85]

In Egypt, the use of electric shock related abuses in detention has consistently been documented by Amnesty International over many years.[86] In February 2020, for example, security forces arbitrarily arrested a human rights researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), a human rights NGO, upon his arrival in Cairo from abroad. His lawyers said that the police subjected him to electric shocks to his upper body using an unspecified device and beatings.[87] In another case, an Egyptian activist whose work focused on defending students' rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly inside universities was arrested in September 2019 and subjected to enforced disappearance

76 Institute for Security Studies, *Tools of torture? Use of electric shock equipment among African police*, June 2016, issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/PolicyBrief85.pdf

77 The High Court of South Africa, *Smith and Others v. Minister of Justice and Correctional Services*, Gauteng Local Division, Johannesburg, Case No: 21639/2015, 31 August 2023, www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAGPJHC/2023/1127.html

78 The High Court of South Africa, *Smith and Others v. Minister of Justice and Correctional Services* (previously cited), para. 145.

79 Amnesty International, *A Turn for the Worse: Violence And Human Rights Violations In Anglophone Cameroon*, (Index: AFR 17/8481/2018), 12 June 2018, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/8481/2018/en/, p. 21: "Those arrested were subjected to different forms of torture, including severe beatings with various objects, such as belts, guns, wires; electric shocks using a generator and a cable; and burning with hot water."

80 Amnesty International, "Somalia: Halt execution spree of children in Puntland," 28 April 2017, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/somalia-halt-execution-spree-of-children-in-puntland-2/ Children subjected to electric shock, burnt with cigarettes on their genitals, beaten and raped into confessing to murders.

81 Amnesty International, "Chad: Release of online activist following global campaign must signal end of repression of dissidents", 6 April 2018, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/chad-release-of-online-activist-following-global-campaign-must-signal-end-of-repression-of-dissidents/ online activist tortured, beaten and subjected to electric shocks.

82 Human Rights Watch, "They Let People Kill Each Other" Violence in Nzérékoré During Guinea's Constitutional Referendum and Legislative Elections, September 2020, www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/25/they-let-people-kill-each-other/violence-nzerekore-during-guineas-constitutional, p. 33: 15 soldiers broke into the home of a 29-year-old man: "they used a taser in my head I felt a strong electric shock all over my body".

83 Human Rights Watch, "Mali: Security Suspects Allegedly Tortured", 15 December 2021, www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/15/mali-security-suspects-allegedly-tortured Government security agents allegedly subjected men to electric shocks, waterboarding, and repeated beatings to extract confessions.

84 Amnesty International, *Syria: Aftermath: Injustice, torture and death in detention in north-east Syria*,(Index: MDE 24/7752/2024), 17 April 2024 www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE24/7752/2024/en/, p. 7.

85 Amnesty International, *Syria: Aftermath* (previously cited), p. 203

86 Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024*, Egypt entry, (Index: POL 10/7200/2024), 23 April 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/, p. 157; Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2021/22*, Egypt entry, (Index: POL 10/4870/2022), 29 March 2022, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2022/03/annual-report-202122, p. 154

87 Amnesty International, *Report 2020/21: The state of the world's human rights*, (Index: POL 10/3202/2021), 7 April 2021, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/3202/2021/en/, p. 148.

for 24 days by the National Security Agency (NSA). During this period, he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment – including using an unspecified electric shock device - for the purpose of extracting "confessions".[88] In a communication to the Egyptian authorities dated 9 August 2022, UN independent experts raised concerns that "the investigating officer insulted him, beat him, tied his legs to a metal chair and electrocuted him several times."[89]

Use of direct contact electric shock weapons against detainees has also been documented in Yemen[90] and the United Arab Emirates.[91] Electric shock related torture where device type was not specified has been documented Lebanon[92] and Libya.[93]

2.2 USE AGAINST PROTESTERS

With the acquisition of electric shock weapons by greater numbers of law enforcement agencies around the world, stun guns, electric shock batons and PESWs in direct contact mode are increasingly being used in the policing of assembly and to torture or otherwise ill-treat protesters both on the street and in detention.

THE RIGHT OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

The right of peaceful assembly is enshrined in Article 21 of the ICCPR which obliges states to respect, protect and facilitate assemblies.[94] Where law enforcement officials are involved in the policing of assembly, they should comply with these obligations. In addition, they should seek to de-escalate situations that might result in violence, and exhaust non-violent means before resorting to the use of force. Further, any use of force must comply with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, precaution and non-discrimination.[95] Given their high threshold of use, PESWs must not be used for the policing of assemblies, to disperse assembly participants or in response to passive resistance.[96] Law enforcement officials should not, therefore, routinely carry PESWs while policing assemblies, and PESWs must not be used in "drive stun" mode in any circumstances, including against protesters.

88 Amnesty International, "Egypt: Abused Egyptian activist unjustly detained", (Index Number: MDE 12/6869/2023), 9 June 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/6869/2023/en/

89 The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and others, Letter to the Egyptian Government, Ref.: AL EGY 6/2022, 9 August 2022, spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27435

90 Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, UN Doc. A/HRC/48/20, 13 September 2021, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/A_HRC_48_20_AdvanceEditedVersion.pdf, para. 71: "Woman shocked daily with electric batons and deprived of sleep, being left to stand on one leg for periods."

91 Reuters, "Britons accuse UAE of torture before U.N. committee", 12 July 2022, www.reuters.com/world/uk/britons-accuse-uae-torture-before-un-committee-2022-07-12/ Man alleged he was tortured with an electric shock baton "for wearing a Qatar T-shirt" while visiting the UAE.

92 Amnesty International, "Lebanon is failing torture survivors by delaying implementation of crucial reforms", 26 June 2019,: "Torture survivors described being subjected to brutal beatings including being struck with a hose or metal chains, given electric shocks on their genitalia, being hung in stress positions for long periods, having their finger bones cracked or being violently slapped or kicked in the face, head and body."

93 Amnesty International, "Libya: Internal Security Agency must end abuses in name of 'guarding virtue'", 14 February 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/libya-internal-security-agency-must-end-abuses-in-name-of-guarding-virtue/ "ISA interrogators have routinely subjected detainees to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence, beatings, electric shocks and suspension in stress positions."

94 ICCPR, Article 21.

95 UN Human Rights Committee, 'General Comment 37: Article 21 (The Right of Peaceful Assembly)' 2020, CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 78.

96 CPT, Electrical discharge weapons (extract from the 20th General Report of the CPT), CPT/Inf (2010)28-part, para. 73. The CPT states that the resort to electrical discharge weapons during public order operations is inappropriate unless there is a real and immediate threat to life or risk of serious injury. Amnesty International, PESWs Position Paper (previously cited), Section 2.4.3, pp. 22-23

Police officers detain a protester during peaceful protests against the war in Ukraine in Moscow, 21 September 2022 © Getty Images

In Russia in 2021, security forces widely used electric shock devices during two major peaceful protest rallies, one on 31 January in Moscow and another on 21 April in St Petersburg. Amnesty International staff witnessed repeated use of such weapons at the rally in Moscow against a person who was lying on the ground.[97] A video shot at the rally in St Petersburg shows police officers using an electric shock weapon at least four times on someone who was not resisting.[98] Electric shock batons were again deployed in crackdowns on peaceful protests against the war in Ukraine in Moscow in March 2022. [99]

In April 2024, in the USA, police in Atlanta, Georgia, were filmed using a TASER in direct contact mode on the leg of a Black protester at a Palestine solidarity demonstration who was pinned to the ground by three police officers and handcuffed.[100]

In some cases, protesters have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated after being arrested and detained. In Belarus, in August 2020, in the wake of violent crackdowns on post-election protests, thousands of protesters were detained and subject to torture and other ill-treatment, including with electric shock weapons.[101] One protester, who was then 16 years old, said he was beaten with an electric shock baton. He remains in solitary confinement after being sentenced to five years in a correctional colony after a trial marred by irregularities.[102]

97 Amnesty International, *Russia: No place for protest*, (Index: EUR 46/4328/2021), www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4328/2021/en/ p. 14.

98 OVD-Info, Twitter post, 21 April 2021, twitter.com/OvdInfo/status/1384958515735932932: "Use of a taser by security forces in Petersburg. We found footage where it is clearly visible. Video from our subscriber." (Translation from Russian by Amnesty International.)

99 Human Rights Watch, "Russian Police are Torturing Anti-War Activists", 20 October 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/20/russian-police-are-torturing-anti-war-activists

100 Wall Street Journal News, "Police Use Taser as Universities Crack Down on Pro-Palestinian Protests", 26 April 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=iStR3f9DBKw

101 Human Rights Watch, "Belarus: Systematic Beatings, Torture of Protesters", 15 September 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/15/belarus-systematic-beatings-torture-protesters

102 Amnesty International, "Belarus: Release minor sentenced to five years imprisonment after unfair trial", 14 April 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3984/2021/en/

After crackdowns on protests in Nicaragua in April 2018, detained protesters were subjected to multiple acts of torture and other ill-treatment. According to accounts received by OHCHR, some detainees were subjected to "physical torture -including through burnings with Taser guns and/or cigarettes, use of barbed wires, beatings with fists and tubes and attempted strangulation – as well as psychological torture, including death threats."[103]

IRAN

Amnesty International has extensively documented the use of electric shocks and other methods of torture and other ill-treatment in Iran, including against individuals arrested and detained in the context of repeated protest crackdowns.[104]

In response to nationwide protests in November 2019, police, intelligence and security agents, and some prison officials used torture and other ill-treatment against men, women and children, both during arrest and later in detention centres and prisons across the country. Protesters were subjected to torture using a range of less lethal equipment, including restraints, pepper spray, batons and electric shock devices, along with hooding, waterboarding and mock executions. Victims told Amnesty International that stun guns were used on different parts of their bodies and, in at least three cases documented by the organization, on the victims' testicles.[105]

In one case documented by Amnesty International, a detainee was strapped to a chair which was bolted to the floor before being drenched in water and subjected to electric shock torture from an unspecified device to his temples. He told Amnesty International: "The electric shocks were the worst form of torture for me. One of my interrogators would instruct the others to 'tickle him a little', by which they meant to administer a low voltage shock. But this so-called 'tickling' felt like my entire body was being pierced with millions of needles. If I refused to answer their questions, they would raise the voltage levels and give me stronger electric shocks. Each time I was given one of these stronger electric shocks, it felt like there was an earthquake in my body... I would shake violently and there would be a strong burning sensation coursing through my whole body... To this day, I have continued to be affected... The torture has had lasting effects on my mental and physical health. To this day, I still can't sleep at night."[106]

During the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising of September-December 2022, Amnesty International documented intelligence and security forces using sexual violence against protesters, as well as other methods of torture and other ill-treatment, including electric shocks on their heads, chests, necks, feet, and genitals. In some cases, the torture resulted in chronic physical pain and problems requiring medical care.[107]

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103 para. 80

104 Amnesty International, "Iran: Child detainees subjected to flogging, electric shocks and sexual violence in brutal protest crackdown", 16 March 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/iran-child-detainees-subjected-to-flogging-electric-shocks-and-sexual-violence-in-brutal-protest-crackdown/; Amnesty International, "Iran: Quash death sentences of young protesters subjected to gruesome torture", 27 January 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/iran-quash-death-sentences-of-young-protesters-subjected-to-gruesome-torture/; Amnesty International, "Iran: A decade of deaths in custody unpunished amid systemic impunity for torture", 15 September 2021, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/iran-a-decade-of-deaths-in-custody-unpunished-amid-systemic-impunity-for-torture/; Amnesty International, Iran: *Growing up on death row: The death penalty and juvenile offenders in Iran*, (Index: MDE 13/3112/2016), 26 January 2016, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3112/2016/en/; Amnesty International, *Iran: Trampling Humanity – Mass arrests, disappearances and torture since Iran's 2019 November protests*, (Index: MDE 13/2891/2020), 2 September 2020, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2891/2020/en/.

105 Amnesty International, *Iran: Trampling Humanity – Mass arrests, disappearances and torture since Iran's 2019 November protests*, (Index: MDE 13/2891/2020), 2 September 2020, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2891/2020/en/, p. 40.

106 Amnesty International, *Iran: Trampling Humanity* (previously cited), p. 40.

107 Amnesty International, *Iran: They violently raped me": Sexual violence weaponized to crush Iran's 'Woman life freedom' uprising*, 6 December 2023, (Index: MDE 13/7480/2023), www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7480/2023/en/

In one case, a male protester who helped several girls escape a violent arrest during a protest was arrested and tortured through electric shocks, beatings and gang rape. He told Amnesty International: "I saw plain-clothes security forces giving several girls electric shocks and dragging them across the street to arrest them. I went over to help them…when the security forces gave me electric shocks and sprayed pepper spray into my eyes…They arrested me…I was given electric shocks to my face, hands, back…Once inside [the van, the agents] made us face the walls…and gave electric shocks to our legs so that our legs went completely limp, and we fell to our knees and then onto the floor. Then, they pulled down my trousers and raped me…In the prison…[there] were several people there whose entire bodies were covered with burns from electric shocks."[108]

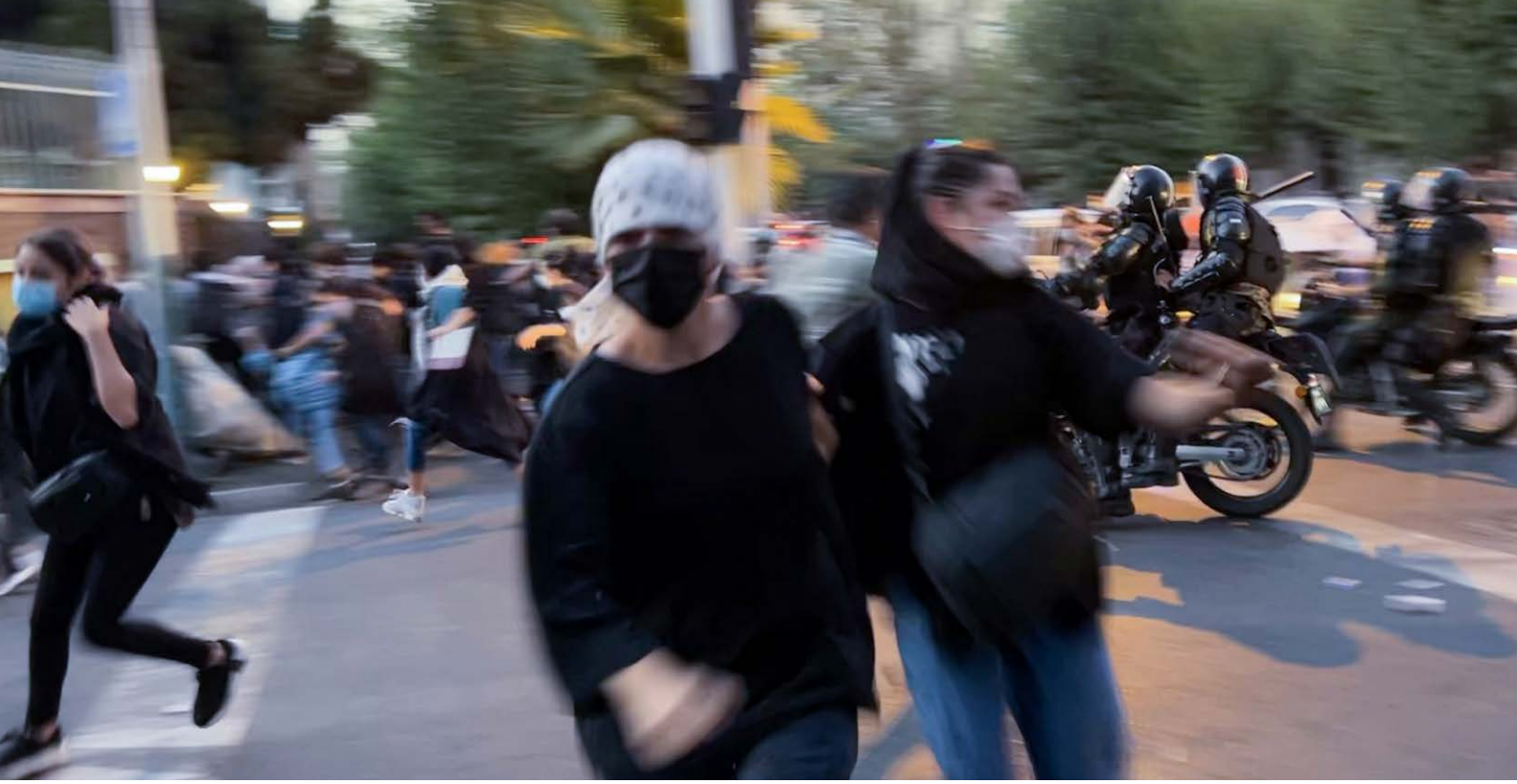
In another case, a protester described to Amnesty International the horrific pain he felt upon being given electric shocks to his genitals: "There were around 40-50 of us arrested and we were beaten severely at the time of arrest through slaps, punches, electric shocks, and with the end of rifles…When we arrived at the [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Basij battalion] base…the Basij agents forced us all to stand facing the wall…opened our legs and gave us electric shocks to our genitals [in the area of the perineum] with stun guns. That area is very sensitive. When they did that, I can't even explain how excruciating the pain felt. You couldn't continue standing on your feet. If we fell to the ground after being given electric shocks, they would kick us in our faces and stomachs and force us to stand again, threatening that if we fall down again, next time it would be worse."[109]

USE AGAINST CHILDREN

During the nationwide protests of November 2019, dozens of children aged between 11 and 17 in the small city of Likak in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including through the use of electric shocks using stun guns. According to an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International, upon being released from detention weeks later, several children suffered profound psychological trauma which affected their temperament and schoolwork.[110]

During the 2022 "Woman Life Freedom" uprising, children were again targeted.[111] In one case, IRGC Basij battalion agents forced several boys to stand with their legs apart in a line alongside adult detainees and administered electric shocks to their genitals with stun guns. In another case, several schoolboys were abducted for writing the protest slogan "Woman Life Freedom" on a wall. One of the boys told Amnesty International: "They hit my face with the back of a gun, gave electric shocks to my back, and beat me with batons on the bottom of my feet and hands…They threatened that if we told anyone what they did to us, they would detain us again, do even worse to us, and deliver our corpses to our families. Then they took us in a car [and] dumped us somewhere remote…My friend and I just hugged each other and cried."[112]

108 Amnesty International, Iran: *They violently raped me"* (previously cited), p. 39-40.
109 Amnesty International, Iran: *They violently raped me"* (previously cited), p. 52.
110 Amnesty International, Iran: *Trampling Humanity,* pp. 22-3.
111 Amnesty International, "Iran: Child detainees subjected to flogging, electric shocks and sexual violence in brutal protest crackdown", 16 March 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/iran-child-detainees-subjected-to-flogging-electric-shocks-and-sexual-violence-in-brutal-protest-crackdown/
112 Amnesty International, Iran: *They violently raped me"* (previously cited), p. 30-31.



Security forces violently disperse protesters in Iran during the Woman Life Freedom uprising of September-December 2022, sparked by Jina Mahsa Amini's death in custody after her arbitrary arrest over compulsory veiling © Stringer/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

The use of direct contact electric shock weapons against protesters has also been documented in Brazil,[113] Mauritania,[114] and Hungary.[115]

CONCLUSION

These cases offer a window into a dark world of unimaginable pain, suffering and humiliation at the hands of law enforcement and other security forces. They represent the tip of the iceberg, due to the secretive nature of torture and other ill-treatment, the fact that electric shock weapons often leave no visible trace, and the rarity of thoroughly documented cases. They underline the urgency of a global, legally-binding prohibition on the production of and trade in direct contact electric shock equipment used for law enforcement. Such devices have no place in policing and have become one of the preferred tools for torturers the world over. It is time for states to come together to put an end to the production and trade and use of this equipment, prohibit the use of the "drive stun" mode and work towards its removal from all PESWs.

113 UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, *Report on his mission to Brazil*, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/57/Add.4, 29 January 2016, spinternet.ohchr.org/Download.aspx?SymbolNo=A%2fHRC%2f31%2f57%2fAdd.4&Lang=en, p. 51 use of "electrical shocks with taser guns" for crowd control.

114 Human Rights Watch, "Mauritania: University Age Cutoff Suspended: Discriminatory Rule Sparked Ongoing Protests", 8 November 2019, www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/08/mauritania-university-age-cutoff-suspended: "Those interviewed said that the police regularly used electric batons and beat protesters with sticks to disperse the protesters."

115 Amnesty International, *Europe: Under Protected and Over Restricted: The state of the right to protest in 21 European countries*, (Index: EUR 01/8199/2024), 8 June, 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/8199/2024/en/ p. 117, Use of TASER in direct contact mode against peaceful protesters to remove a protester from a bridge after the official end of a notified demonstration, and against an activist peacefully protesting against a forced eviction.

3. THE ABUSE OF PROJECTILE ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS

INTRODUCTION

Projectile electric shock weapons (PESWs) have become a commonplace tool of policing in many countries, including Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA. Their use is being introduced across Europe and expanding in the Global South. According to Axon, by far the largest manufacturer of PESWs, the TASER model is currently in use in over 80 countries.[116]

While the rationale for using PESWs was originally as a less lethal alternative to firearms, use has expanded to situations in which firearms would never be justified. In many cases, PESWs are deployed simply to enforce compliance with an order, where there is no threat to life or of serious injury, or before other options such as de-escalation, mediation, temporary withdrawal had been fully explored.[117] The misuse of PESWs has been linked to serious injuries, sometimes from falls, and deaths.[118]

Previous work by Amnesty International on TASER use in the USA found that US law enforcement agencies deployed PESWs "as a relatively low-level force option to subdue non-compliant or disturbed individuals who do not pose a significant threat… such cases have included use of TASERs on schoolchildren; pregnant women; people who are mentally ill or intoxicated; elderly people with dementia and individuals suffering from the effects of medical conditions such as epileptic seizures."[119] Those who had died following the use of TASER had been subjected to multiple or prolonged shocks, often lasting far longer than the standard five-second cycle. Some cases involved the use of TASERs in conjunction with other forms of restraint such as hogtying, or with chokeholds and pepper spray.[120]

These trends have continued; in practice the threshold for use of PESWs remains very low. PESWs are becoming a default option for dealing with conflict, leading to their unnecessary or disproportionate deployment.[121] In some situations their use may constitute torture or other ill-treatment. Their use

116 Axon, Brand Statistics, www.axon.com/taser-brand-statistics; Condor, the manufacturer of Spark, claims that its products are used in over 55 countries, although does not disaggregate this figure by product line, www.condornaoletal.com.br/company; the Russian company, the March Group, claims to have produced 170,000 PESWs, /russian-shockers.com/about.html.

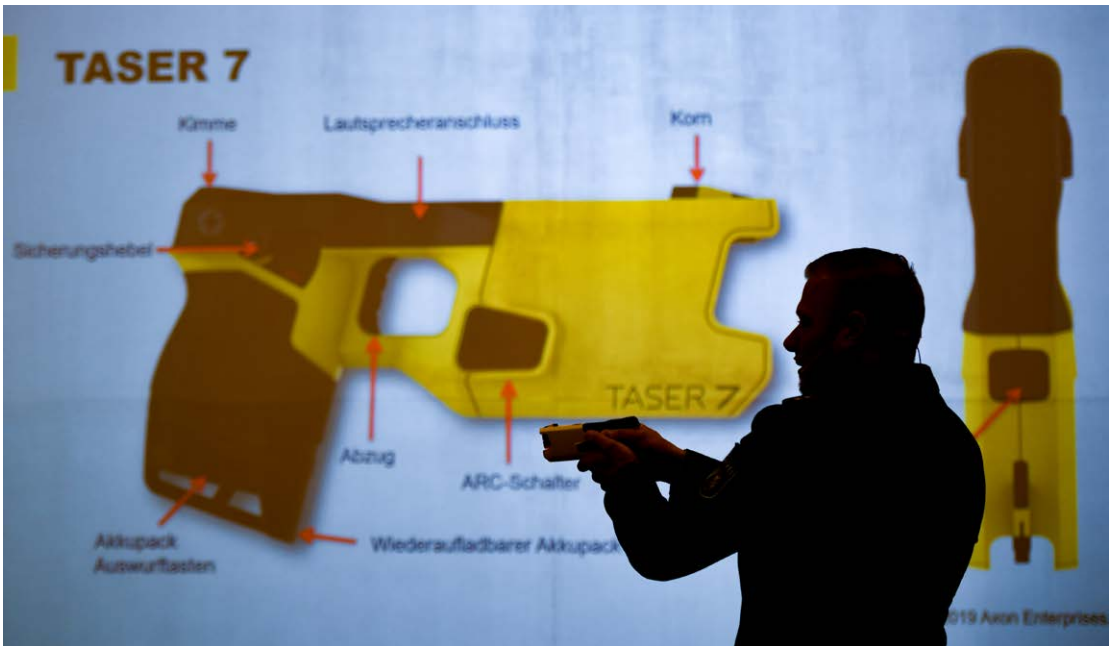
117 Abi Dymond, *Electric-Shock Weapons, Tasers and Policing: Myths and Realities*, Routledge, October 2021, www.researchgate.net/publication/355217437_Electric-Shock_Weapons_Tasers_and_Policing_Myths_and_Realities, p. 45

118 Reuters, ; The London Metropolitan Police (MET), Taser used by officers from 2020/21 to 2022/23, Freedom of information request reference no: 01.FOI.23.030290, www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/disclosure-2023/june-2023/taser-used-officers-2020-21-2022-23 The MET recorded 27 serious injuries over the last 3 financial years up the end of March 2023. This represented 0.11 % of uses of TASER during this period.

119 Amnesty International, *USA: "Less than lethal"? The Use of Stun Weapons in US Law Enforcement*, 16 December 2008, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR51/010/2008/en/

120 Amnesty International, *USA: Excessive and lethal force? Amnesty International's concerns about deaths and ill-treatment involving police use of taser* (Index: AMR 51/139/2004), November 2004, www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/amr511392004en.pdf, pp. 6-9.

121 IOPC, *Review of IOPC cases involving the use of Taser 2015-2020*, August 2021, www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/IOPC_Taser_review_2021.pdf, p. 5. "One quarter of cases we reviewed saw Taser used for compliance. In just under a third of the cases, we identified potential missed opportunities for officers to deescalate situations". New York Times, "Abuse and Injury Result From Uneven Rules on Police Taser Use", 14 January 2025, www.nytimes.com/2025/01/14/us/abuse-and-injury-result-from-uneven-rules-on-police-taser-use.html



A police officer demonstrates the handling of a TASER 7 in Dortmund, Germany, 15 January 2021 © Sascha Schuermann/Getty Images

against vulnerable individuals - children, older people and those suffering from mental health crises – has been widely documented. Where data exist, PESWs has been shown to be used disproportionately against racialised groups, reflecting systemic discrimination found in many criminal justice systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USE OF PESWs

PESWs used as a stand-off weapon can play a legitimate role in law enforcement. However, given the high risks of primary and secondary injuries (e.g. from falls), their use must be set at a high threshold – that is situations involving a threat to life or risk of serious injury which cannot be contained by less extreme options.[122] This would allow appropriately trained officers to deploy such weapons as a last resort at or just before the point at which they would otherwise be justified in resorting to firearms. Where use is necessary, proportionate and lawful, PESWs should be discharged for the minimum period possible (normally not more than a 5 second burst) by trained law enforcement officers and each use should be recorded with data disaggregated by age, gender, ethnic background and vulnerabilities.

PESWs should never be used for the policing of protests, or routinely in places of detention or mental health settings. States must strictly control the trade in these goods to law enforcement agencies to ensure they are not used in the commission of torture or other-ill-treatment. States must also have in place robust regulations on human rights-compliant use, ensure that law enforcement officials are properly trained, and establish independent oversight mechanisms to investigate and address any incidents of misuse, including providing for an effective remedy and reparation for victims. As mentioned above, use in direct contact "drive stun" mode should be prohibited and the "drive stun" mode removed from all future models.

122 CPT, 20th General Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, CPT/Inf(2010)28, 26 October 2010, paras. 69-71.

3.1 DISCRIMINATORY USE OF PESWs

Discrimination is often entrenched in criminal justice systems, manifesting in discriminatory and disproportionate impacts against marginalized groups. While there is a lack of disaggregated data on the use of force in law enforcement,[123] the data that exist point to starkly unequal treatment of discriminated-against groups by law enforcement on the street, at the point of arrest and in detention.[124] These patterns are not incidental but reflective of systemic racism embedded within law enforcement practices and institutions. Even in the absence of disaggregated data, the context of systemic racism means that PESWs are more likely to be used against racialized groups, perpetuating discrimination and violence.[125]

In the latest use of force figures for England and Wales published by the UK Home Office for April 2023 to March 2024, TASERs were used – that is drawn, aimed or discharged[126] - a total of 33,232 times.[127] TASER was used on someone from a Black ethnic group at a rate 4.2 times higher than someone from a white ethnic group in England and Wales (excluding the Metropolitan Police), and at a rate 4.4 times higher in the Metropolitan police force area, when percentages of TASER use by ethnicity were compared with the breakdown of ethnic groups in the general population in the 2021 Census.[128] A report by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), which analyzed 101 cases the body had reviewed between 2015 and 2020, found that Black people were more likely to be tasered for prolonged periods (over 5 seconds) than white people.[129] A long-term academic study into racial disparity in the use of PESWs in England and Wales published in October 2023 found that the causes were complex and multifactorial, including inequality and structural racism, and concluded that "experiences of Taser sit within a broader context where policing more generally is already understood as disproportionate toward Black and other ethnic minority communities".[130]

123 Report of the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement, Promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers, A/HRC/51/55, 4 August 2022, documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/442/50/PDF/G2244250.pdf?OpenElement

124 OHCHR, Conference Room Paper, B. People of African descent, law enforcement and the criminal justice system, A/HRC/47/CRP.1, 28 June 2021, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Racism/A_HRC_47_CRP_1.pdf, paras 80-119.

125 OHCHR, Conference Room Paper (previously cited), paras 80-119.

126 According to the data set methodology, "CED [Conducted Energy Device] use is recorded against 7 categories: drawn, aimed, arced and red-dot (non-discharge uses - no electricity is discharged into the person) and direct contact mode, fired and angle drive-stun (discharge uses)." UK Home Office, *User guide to Police use of force statistics, England and Wales*, 2.2 Data coverage,Updated 30 November 2023, www.gov.uk/government/publications/user-guide-to-police-use-of-force-statistics-england-and-wales/user-guide-to-police-use-of-force-statistics-england-and-wales

127 UK Home Office, *Police use of force statistics, England and Wales: April 2023 to March 2024*, 6. CED [Conducted Energy Device] use, 5 December 2023,www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-use-of-force-statistics-april-2023-to-march-2024/police-use-of-force-statistics-england-and-wales-april-2023-to-march-2024#ced-conducted-energy-device This is roughly double the usage since 2017/18 when TASERs were issued to fewer officers, though represents a slight reduction on recent years.

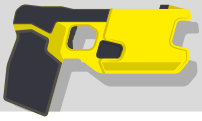
128 UK Home Office, *Police use of force statistics England and Wales: April 2023 to March 2024* (previously cited), 6.4 Rate of CED use highest for black ethnic group – see also 4.4 for a discussion on limitations on use of force by ethnicity calculations; Office of National Statistics, *Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021*, 4. How ethnic composition varied across England and Wales, 29 November 2022. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=%22Black%2C%20Black%20British%2C%20Caribbean,was%2081.0%25%20(45.8%20million)

129 Independent Office for Police Conduct (henceforth IOPC), *Review of IOPC cases involving the use of Taser 2015-2020*, August 2021, www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/IOPC_Taser_review_2021.pdf, p. 11: Twenty-nine per cent (29%) of White people involved in Taser discharges were subjected to continuous discharges of more than five seconds, whereas the figure was 60% for Black people. However, in the limited number of cases reviewed, Black people were, as a proportion, less likely to have been subjected to a Taser discharge than white people but were more likely to be involved in cases where the Taser was aimed or red dotted, see p. 11.

130 Keele University, *TASERD: Taser and Social, Ethnic and Racial Disparities research programme,* October 2023, www.keele.ac.uk/media/k-web/k-research/kpac/taserd-report.pdf, p. 21.

A Baltimore Police officer aims a TASER at a demonstrator on 27 April 2015 in Baltimore, Maryland. The protest followed the funeral of a young Black man who had died in police custody. © Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

April 2023 to March 2024 Latest use of force figures for England and Wales published by the UK Home Office



TASERS were used (drawn, aimed or discharged) **33,232 times**

Data collection elsewhere has been poor. The International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement's report to the Human Rights Council notes that the collection of disaggregated data is "central to any effort to drive and assess responses to systemic racism, including objectively measuring the impact of corrective measures and subsequent reforms" and key "to achieving the right to non-discrimination". The Mechanism has issued detailed recommendations on how states should collect such data.[131]

In the absence of state records, some research has been carried out by the media and NGOs. A large-scale project conducted by Reuters, which reviewed autopsies, court documents, police reports, other public records and news accounts developed a database of 1,081 deaths in the USA involving TASERs from 1983-2018.[132] Of the 804 deaths in which it was possible to identify race, 342 (43%) were Black people and 308 (38%) white people. According to the 2020 US census, the breakdown in the US population is made up of 13% Black people (excluding mixed race category which is 3.1%) and 75% white people.[133]

131 Report of the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement, "Promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers", UN Doc. A/HRC/51/55, 4 August 2022, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g22/442/50/pdf/g2244250.pdf, paras 25-9.

132 Reuters Investigates, Shock Tactics, www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-taser-database/

133 Unites States Census Bureau, *US Census 2020*, Quick Facts, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222

"EXCITED DELIRIUM"

In the USA, the term "excited delirium", which has no scientific basis, has been repeatedly used in reports of causes of death in custody.[134] Originally used to describe deaths of Black people from cocaine-related "delirium" in the 1980s, the term has since been used to describe a severely agitated mental and physical state. It has been disproportionately applied to young Black males to justify use of force by law enforcement and to deflect accountability for racial discrimination, biases and in-custody deaths. A meta-study of medical literature referencing "excited delirium" analyzing 66 peer-reviewed journal articles published up to 18 March 2017, found that "young age, male sex, African-American race, and being overweight are all independent risk factors for fatal ExDS [excited delirium syndrome].[135] A report by Physicians for Human Rights concluded that "the term "excited delirium" cannot be disentangled from its racist and unscientific origins" and called for an end to its use as a cause of death.[136] The report also highlights the fact that Axon has actively promoted the term through the distribution of free materials at conferences of medical examiners and police chiefs.[137] On 8 October 2023, the State of California approved Assembly Bill No. 360 prohibiting the use of the term "excited delirium" "from being recognized as a valid medical diagnosis or cause of death".[138]

REPEATEDLY TASERED

A 31-year-old Black man, cousin of the co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, was pursued by police while behaving erratically during a mental health crisis in Los Angeles in January 2023. He was eventually restrained after he ran into traffic and tasered first by projectile electric shock at close quarters as he lay struggling on the ground with three police officers on top of him. He was then tasered in "drive stun" mode five times in succession while he was restrained and largely compliant, pleading for the officer to stop and at one point clearly saying: "I'm not resisting".[139] He died in hospital four and half hours later.

The Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner could not determine the manner of death, but gave causes as the "effects of cardiomyopathy (enlarged heart) and cocaine use".[140] Following the man's death, independent expert to the Human Rights Council and former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, said that police officers were using TASERs "as a routine protocol to incapacitate non-compliant or individuals going through mental health crises, who often do not appear to pose a serious danger to themselves or others. We remain highly concerned about the excessive use of tasers in law enforcement, especially in light of their inherent potential for misuse".[141]

134 Altaf Saadia and others, *End the use of "excited delirium" as a cause of death in police custody*, The Lancet, Volume 399, Issue 10329, 12 March 2022, www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)00410-X/abstract, pp. 1028-1030.

135 Philippe Gonin and others, *CME Information: Excited Delirium: A Systematic Review*, Academic Emergency Medicine, 9 October 2017, doi.org/10.1111/acem.13330, p. 561.

136 Physicians for Human Rights, *"Excited Delirium" and Deaths in Police Custody: The Deadly Impact of a Baseless Diagnosis*, March 2022, p. 3, pp. 68-71.

137 Physicians for Human Rights, *"Excited Delirium"*, (previously cited), p. 4.

138 California Legislative Information, Assembly Bill No. 360, Approved by Governor on 8 October, 2023, leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB360

139 YouTube, Los Angeles Police Department, Pacific Area ICD 1/3/2023 (NRF002-23), www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVTYcbPX0GA

140 Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner, "Cause and Manner of Death Determined for Keenan Darnell Anderson", 2 June 2023, me.lacounty.gov/2023/press-releases/cause-and-manner-of-death-determined-for-keenan-darnell-anderson/

141 OHCHR, "UN experts call for new approaches to policing in the United States following deaths of Keenan Anderson and Tyre Nichols", 10 February 2023, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/un-experts-call-new-approaches-policing-united-states-following-deaths

THE USE OF TASER FOR COMPLIANCE

A thirty-seven-year-old Black man was tasered in the UK in the City of London after being stopped by police for alleged speeding on 7 April 2018.[142] He sustained head injuries after he fell back onto a stone ledge. The incident, which was recorded on a police officer's body-worn camera, occurred when police officers tried to arrest the man after a series of breathalyzer tests had failed to register a result. Footage clearly shows that at the time the TASER was discharged the man was standing with his arms folded talking to his friend and in mid-sentence.[143] The man brought proceedings against the Commissioner of Police for the City of London for damages for assault and battery and misfeasance in a public office which he won in the Court of Appeal on 25 October 2024. The appeal court judges concluded that tasers are "potentially lethal weapons" and that the use of the taser against an individual who was "standing still in a non-aggressive stance with his arms folded and talking to his friend, was not objectively reasonable in the circumstances".[144]

3.2 PESWs USE AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

PESWs have often been deployed against people suffering mental health crises in public, in their homes, in prisons and inside mental health institutions. According to a literature review of 31 studies of PESW use against people suffering mental health crises in Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA from 2006-18 (with the exception of one paper published in 1987), found that PESWs "are more likely to be used on people experiencing mental distress than in cases of criminal arrest, and that these people are subject to a greater number of Taser shocks".[145]

A report by the UK Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) found that incidents where mental health was a factor, people were more likely to be subjected to multiple and prolonged discharges than in their overall sample of 101 cases reviewed from 2015-20.[146] One academic study which analyzed internal use of force data from a single, anonymous police force in England and Wales between 2007-15, found "a significant association between mental health status and Taser firing" and that people suffering mental health issues was associated with an 80% increase in the odds of a TASER being discharged.[147]

The US Reuters database documented 273 cases deaths following the use of TASERs involving a person showing signs of "mental illness, emotional distress or a neurological disorder" – over 25% of the total deaths recorded. In Germany, where PESWs are beginning to be rolled out in some federal states, six out of 10 cases of death following the used of PESWs documented by Bürgerrechte & Polizei/CILIP since 2021 have involved people suffering mental health crises.[148]

142 Guardian, "Body-worn video shows moment Edwin Afriyie was shot with Taser – video", 29 June 2022, www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2022/jun/29/body-worn-video-shows-moment-edwin-afriyie-is-shot-with-taser-video

143 UK Court of Appeal (Civil Division), Edwin Afriyie (Appellant) and Commissioner of Police For The City Of London (Respondent), Case No: CA-2023-001615, 25 October 2024, assets.caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ewca/civ/2024/1269/ewca_civ_2024_1269.pdf, para. 13.

144 UK Court of Appeal, Edwin Afriyie and Commissioner of Police for the City of London (previously cited), paras 45, 48. For background on the case, see Donoghue Solicitors, "Edwin Afriyie's Appeal: The Inside Story", www.donoghue-solicitors.co.uk/edwin-afriyie-appeal/

145 Nutmeg Hallett and others, *Taser use on individuals experiencing mental distress: An integrative literature review*, Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 28(1):56-71, February 2021, pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31957217/

146 IOPC, *Review of IOPC cases involving the use of Taser 2015-2020*, (previously cited), p. 10.

147 Abi Dymond, *'Taser, Taser'! Exploring factors associated with police use of Taser in England and Wales*, Policing and Society, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 396–411, 2020, doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1551392, p. 402.

148 Zeitschrift Bürgerrechte & Polizei/CILIP, "Tod mit Taser", polizeischuesse.cilip.de/taser

The use of PESWs against individuals experiencing mental health issues often intersect with systemic racism, amplifying existing forms of racial discrimination, violence and other vulnerabilities, such as alcohol or drug use.[149] The prioritization of law enforcement interventions in response to mental health crises rather than mental health care can be rooted in the perception of racialized individuals as threats rather than as individuals in need of care. In some cases, age-related dementia has been a factor in the use of TASERs against older people.

THE USE OF PESWs AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE

In May 2023, a New South Wales police officer discharged a TASER at a 95-year-old woman with dementia who was advancing on the officer using a walking frame while holding a steak knife at a nursing home in Cooma, New South Wales, Australia. She fell and hit her head, fracturing her skull, and died a week later. The police officer involved was found guilty of manslaughter in December 2024.[150] In a similar case in the UK, Sussex police used a TASER, an incapacitant spray, handcuffs and a baton against a wheelchair-bound 93-year-old man, who was threatening staff with a cutlery knife in a care home in St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex, on 21 June 2022. He died three weeks after the incident in hospital. The officers involved were subsequently charged with Actual Bodily Harm (ABH).[151]

3.3 USE OF PESWs AGAINST CHILDREN

Children are at heightened risk of physical and psychological injury from the use of PESWs. According to the UN Guidance on Less Lethal weapons, "children and slender adults may be at greater risk of internal injury from tissue-penetrating barbs, as their body wall is generally less thick."[152] Psychological effects include post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and loss of trust in authority figures.[153]

In the UK, police threatened to use TASERs against children 2,895 times between 2023 and 2024 in England and Wales, with 66 discharges. Over the same period, there were five incidents in which police officers threatened to use TASERs against children under the age of 11.[154] The use of PESWs against children can intersect with systemic racism and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, skin colour, and national origin. According to data from Freedom of Information requests submitted by the Children's Rights Alliance for England, from January to October 2019, 74% of children in London who had a TASER used on them were Black, Asian, or belong to an ethnic minority.[155] An IOPC review of 40 incidents where TASER was discharged on children between May and November 2022 found that over

149 Keele University, *TASERD: Taser and Social, Ethnic and Racial Disparities research programme* (already cited), 1.4. Cross-cutting themes and implications, pp 18-22.
150 BBC, "Officer who Tasered 95-year-old guilty of manslaughter", 27 November 2024, www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yp7g9r8j5o
151 IOPC, "Sussex officers charged following investigation into use of force on elderly man at care home", 14 Mar 2024, www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/sussex-officers-charged-following-investigation-use-force-elderly-man-care-home
152 OHCHR, UN Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal weapons in law enforcement, 2020, www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CCPR/LLW_Guidance.pdf, para. 7.4.6, p. 33.
153 Strategies for Youth, *Catch and Stun: The Use and Abuse of Conducted Electrical Weapons (CEWS) On Children and Youth*, 4. Physical and Psychological Effects of Using Tasers on Children and Teenagers, strategiesforyouth.org/sitefiles/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SFY_Catch-and-Stun_fnl-rev_web.pdf, pp. 26-35.
154 UK Home Office, *Police use of force statistics, England and Wales: April 2023 to March 2024: data tables*, Table 2, police-use-of-force-apr2023-mar2024-tables.ods
155 Children's Rights Alliance for England, *Children's rights and policing: Tasers and children's rights*, March 2020, /crae.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/CRAE_POLICING-TASER-PRINT-1.pdf

a quarter of incidents (27.5%) involved TASER discharge on a Black child, with the same number of incidents involving children experiencing a mental health episode.[156]

An IOPC investigation found that a police officer had held a TASER to the neck of a 16-year-old Black boy during a stop and search in Greenwich, south-east London on 4 September 2020. The boy was unarmed, handcuffed, kneeling in the road with his hands on his head at the time. Ruling that the officer had committed gross misconduct, the IOPC found that the actions were "not necessary, reasonable or proportionate" and that the officer's behaviour was "oppressive and bullying".[157]

In June 2023 the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed deep concern about the use of PESWs (along with pain-inducing techniques and seclusion) against children in the UK - particularly those belonging to ethnic minority groups and children with disabilities. The Committee recommended that the UK take legislative measures to explicitly prohibit "taser guns, attenuating energy projectiles and other electrical discharge weapons" against children.[158]

Data on TASER use against children has not been systematically collected in the USA. However, a survey of research, medical studies and federal cases brought on behalf of youth who had been tasered carried out by Strategies for Youth, an NGO focused on youth interactions with law enforcement, found that TASERs "continue to be used on children and youth who do not pose a threat to the safety of police officers or others" and "are frequently being used by police on children and youth who are in distress or emotional crisis".[159]

156 IOPC, "IOPC statement on review of Taser discharges on children under 18", 1 August 2023, www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/iopc-statement-review-taser-discharges-children-under-18 The study also identified 17 cases involved a TASER being discharged to prevent escape.

157 IOPC, "Gross misconduct proven for Met officer who put Taser to the neck of a boy during stop and search", 20 September 2024, www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/gross-misconduct-proven-met-officer-who-put-taser-neck-boy-during-stop-and-search.

158 Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, UN Doc. CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7, 22 June 2023, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/112/77/pdf/g2311277.pdf

159 Strategies for Youth, *Catch and Stun* (previously cited), p. 4.

CHILD TASERED IN THE BACK

A 16-year-old biracial teenager was confronted by a highway patrol officer in the USA in Fort Myers, Florida, on 16 June 2021 outside his girlfriend's house. The officer claimed that he was acting suspiciously after he had cut through the bushes to get to his girlfriend's backyard. Surveillance footage showed that he was standing several metres from the officer, turned away from him, and posing no threat, when he was tasered in the back.[160] He fell backwards violently hitting his head against the rim of a fire pit. Lying on the ground disorientated, he was tasered again after not complying with an order to put his hands behind his back. He was arrested and detained and charged with loitering, marijuana possession, and disobeying an officer though all charges were subsequently dropped, and he was released after being held in a juvenile detention facility for ten days.[161]

CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, PESWs have proliferated and are becoming a standard tool of policing – particularly in the UK and the USA. Widespread availability has led to more reported cases of abusive use, as the initial rationale for the adoption of PESWs – as a less lethal replacement for firearms – has become increasingly diluted. Levels of discriminatory use of PESWs and use against marginalized groups continue to be concerning.

Law enforcement practices are often influenced by implicit and explicit racial biases that lead to disproportionate targeting of racialized groups. In a context where racism is deeply embedded in policing and law enforcement, the use of PESWs poses a significant risk of exacerbating racial discrimination and violence against racialized individuals, normalizing and institutionalizing violent responses to racialized individuals in their interactions with law enforcement officials. Also of concern are patterns of unnecessary or disproportionate use against children and those suffering mental health crises, including older people.

As PESWs increasingly proliferate globally, the introduction of legally-binding, global trade controls is becoming ever more urgent. There is also a need to ensure all models comply with human rights law and standards. This means both the removal of the direct contact "drive stun" mode from all models and trade regulations to ensure PESWs are not exported to police forces that systematically use them to commit or facilitate torture or other ill-treatment.

160 CBS News, "Video of Florida trooper tasing teen sparks outrage", 22 June 2021, www.cbsnews.com/news/video-shows-florida-state-trooper-tase-teen-outside-girlfriends-home/

161 Washington Post, "A teen cutting through the bushes to visit his girlfriend ended up shocked by a trooper's taser", 3 June 2021, www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/06/23/taser-teen-florida-trooper-black/; Strategies for Youth, *Catch and Stun* (previously cited), p. 8.

4. THE TRADE IN ELECTRIC SHOCK EQUIPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Despite the serious human rights risks related to the deployment of electric shock weapons and devices used for law enforcement shown in preceding chapters, the production and trade in this equipment remains inadequately regulated. Many goods that the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture considers prohibited under the UN Convention Against Torture continue to be promoted at trade fairs and marketed and sold to law enforcement agencies across the world. In contrast to the trade in conventional weapons, there are no UN bodies reporting on global trade in law enforcement goods and few states or companies publish trade figures.

While the EU and some states do regulate the trade in electric shock weapons and equipment, most states have no controls on the production and trade in these goods. There is an urgent need to introduce global, standardized regulations through the negotiation of a legally-binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty that would definitively ban the production, promotion and trade of inherently abusive goods – such as direct contact electric shock weapons and devices – and tightly regulate the trade in goods prone to misuse, such as PESWs.

4.1 GLOBAL PRODUCTION AND TRADE: DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK EQUIPMENT

The manufacture, supply and promotion of direct contact electric shock equipment for law enforcement remains widespread. Analyzing trade directories, marketing materials, and websites of a wide range of companies, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has found 197 companies from all regions that manufactured or promoted direct contact electric shock equipment between January 2018 and June 2023; and 26 companies that manufactured or promoted body-worn electric shock equipment in the same period. Many of the companies which manufacture or promote direct contact electric shock equipment were in Asia (97 companies) and Europe (52 companies), while for body-worn electric shock Asia (11 companies) and North America (8 companies) dominated.[162]

The Omega Research Foundation has updated and disaggregated this data by country, to cover 1 January 2019 - 31 December 2023. Omega research has found during this period that China (57 companies), India (20 companies) and the USA (26 companies) had the most companies manufacturing or promoting direct contact electric shock equipment for law enforcement; while China (5), South Africa (4) and the USA (8) had the most companies manufacturing or promoting body-worn electric shock equipment. Full data sets are included in Annex 1.

162 UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report (previously cited), Annex 3, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/annex-iii-document-august-2023-ae-18-09-23.pdf

MARCH GROUP AND ITS WORLD-WIDE NETWORK OF DISTRIBUTORS

Established in Russia in 1997, the March Group Ltd manufactures a wide range of electric shock equipment and devices for both private and law enforcement markets, including direct contact electric shock batons, stun guns, shock shields and projectile electric shock weapons.[163] In its 2005 promotional brochure March Group stated: "All stun guns and stun batons presented herein are capable of shocking or bringing an assailant into unconscious state for a period of up to 20 minutes by a 1.5 – 3 second action."[164] A 2023 catalogue describing its product range stated that these weapons "can cause spasms of muscles, pain, neutralisation of the enemy, [with a] state of shock [lasting] for up to 5-10 minutes."[165]

The company claims to have manufactured over 200,000 electric shock stun guns which UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has classified as inherently cruel and degrading and therefore prohibited equipment; and more than 170,000 PESWs whose trade should be regulated. [166] March's website says that the company is "the official supplier for law enforcement structures", citing multiple Russian security, prison and civilian services.[167]

In addition to its domestic market, March Group promotes and sells its products internationally. According to information posted on its website, its products have been supplied to clients for law enforcement services in: Armenia (2017 – 2018, 2020), Brazil (2007, 2009), Belarus (2006-18), Bulgaria (2016), India (2011, 2012), Egypt (2017 – 2019), Iran (2015-17), Kazakhstan (2007-18), Kuwait (2016), Lithuania (2011), Saudi Arabia (2016), Serbia (2017), Spain (2012), Syria (2007, 2010), United Arab Emirates (2008), Uzbekistan (2018-19).[168]

Amnesty International wrote to the March Group asking what human rights due diligence the company had in place in relation to domestic and international production and sales. At the time of publication, the company had not replied.

4.2 GLOBAL PRODUCTION AND TRADE: PESWs

As PESWs are more complex products to manufacture than most other electric shock weapons, the number of manufacturing companies is more limited, but the overall production has grown steeply over the last decade. The Special Rapporteur on Torture identified 13 states with at least one company manufacturing or promoting PESWs, which the Omega Research Foundation have broken down into a total of 52 companies, with 20 based in China.[169]

163 UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report (previously cited), Annex 2, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/annex-ii-document-august-2023-18-09-23.pdf

164 March Group, "Stun Guns and Stun Batons", promotional brochure distributed at IWA security exhibition 2005 (copy held by Omega Research Foundation).

165 On file with Omega Research Foundation.

166 March Group, russian-shockers.com/about.html; UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report (previously cited), Annex 1, annex-i-document-august-2023-ae-18-09-23.pdf

167 March Group, "About", russian-shockers.com/about.html March Group claims that it is the official supplier of The Russian Ministry of Interior Affaires, The Russian National Guards, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, the Federal Prisons Service, the Federal Bailiff of Russia, the Departmental Security of Railway Transport of the Russian Federation, the Departmental Security Service of Minenergo, GTSSS, the Departmental Security Service of the Ministry of Finance, Russian Post, Atom-security and STC Roskosmos protection.

168 March Group, "Dealers and Representatives of Companies", russian-shockers.com/contacts/predstaviteli.html

169 See Annex 1 below for full data.

A French gendarme holds a TASER as he patrols at the Christmas market in Tours, central France, 23 December 2016 © Guillaume Souvant/AFP via Getty Images

The US company Axon Enterprise Inc. (Axon) dominates the global PESW market, especially in the Global North. Axon claims that their TASER brand models are currently in use by over 18,000 law enforcement agencies in more than 80 countries, with in excess of 960,000 TASER energy weapons currently in service globally.[170] The expansion in the trade of TASER has meant that a product that has been predominantly used in the Global North is now spreading into non-North American/European/Australasian markets.[171]

TASER EXPORTS TO COLOMBIA

One market Axon has consistently exported to is Colombia. According to data from Market Inside, a company providing global import-export shipping data, Axon has shipped just under US$8 million worth of goods related to "Weapons, ammunition, and their parts and accessories" between 2019 and 2023.[172] All 194 shipments have gone to Eagle Commercial S.A. which describes itself as a leading Colombian company providing security and defense equipment – including several TASER models – to the Colombian law enforcement agencies and other security forces.[173] During this period, Amnesty International has consistently documented the unlawful use of less lethal weapons by the Colombian National police, in particular the unit that was then called Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD), with ongoing lack of accountability for past violations.[174]

170 Axon, "Taser Brand Statistics", www.axon.com/taser-brand-statistics

171 See, for example, PR Newswire, "Axon Announces First TASER 7 Deployment in the Maldives", 9 June 2023, www.prnewswire.com/apac/news-releases/axon-announces-first-taser-7-deployment-in-the-maldives-301845995.html; PR Newswire, "Puebla Municipal Police Partners with Axon for Largest TASER Device Deployment in Mexico", 22 September 2021, www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/puebla-municipal-police-partners-with-axon-for-largest-taser-device-deployment-in-mexico-301382208.html; "Gujarat State Police is the First Major Police Agency in India to Deploy Axon TASER Devices", 24 June 2020, www.prnewswire.com/in/news-releases/gujarat-state-police-is-the-first-major-police-agency-in-india-to-deploy-axon-taser-devices-899673729.html

172 According to data drawn from Market Inside, dashboard.marketinsidedata.com

173 Eagle Commercial SA, "Perfil de la Compañía", www.eaglecommercial.com.co/acerca-de-eagle-commercial/

174 Amnesty International, Programa de Acción por la Igualdad y la Inclusión Social (PAIIS) and Temblores, *Colombia: Shoots on Sight: Eye Trauma in the Context of the National Strike*, (Colombia: Shoots on Sight), 26 November 2021, (Index: AMR 23/5005/2021), amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/5005/2021/en/; OHCHR, "Colombia: Experts gravely concerned by lack of truth, justice and accountability for killings and other human rights violations during 2021 National Strike", 30 September 2024, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/colombia-experts-gravely-concerned-lack-truth-justice-and-accountability

The use of TASERs have been directly linked to human rights violations in Colombia. In September 2020, police officers repeatedly shocked 44-year-old lawyer using a TASER X2 in "drive stun" mode for approximately five minutes as he lay immobilized on the ground (see p. 22).[175] In a separate case, according to Human Rights Watch, in March 2020, a 24-year-old man was arbitrarily detained, handcuffed and beaten. At the police station he said that police applied electric shocks from a TASER to his face, abdomen, back, and neck.[176] Local NGO, Temblores, has documented 18 cases of human rights violations involving TASERs, including their involvement in three police killings from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2024.[177] The deployment of TASERs has been observed at the policing of public assembly – a concerning development given the inappropriateness of the use of PESWs in the policing of protests and the high potential for their misuse.[178]

In response to written questions put by Amnesty International, the Colombian Ministry of Defense explained that the use of projectile electric shock weapons (PESWs) is regulated by general principles governing the use of less lethal weapons, which include the necessity, legality, proportionality and rationality for the use of force and prioritizing preventive means before resorting to force and firearms. The use of PESWs in direct contact mode depended on "the perception of risk versus safety and the level of resistance of the person".[179] Amnesty International has written to Axon and Eagle Commercial S.A. requesting they provide information on the measures they have taken to reduce the risks that their products are used to facilitate or commit human rights violations in Colombia. At the time of publication, Eagle Commercial S.A. had not replied. Axon replied saying "Axon takes seriously its adherence to all US Export controls, and exports its weapons only to approved end-users and end-uses under the EAR [US Department of Commerce Export Administration Regulations].[180]

4.3 TRADE FAIRS

Unlike transfers of military equipment which many states regulate and report at least to some extent domestically and internationally through national reporting, reports to the UN Register of Conventional Arms and their annual Arms Trade Treaty export and import reports,[181] there is a dearth of data on transfers of law enforcement equipment. Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation, along with national human rights activists and journalists have exposed aspects of the trade through open-source investigations.

175 Amnesty International, "Colombia: Amnesty International condemns torture and excessive use of force by police", 11 September 2020, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/colombia-amnistia-condena-tortura-uso-excesivo-fuerza/

176 Human Rights Watch, "Colombia: Abuses Amid Massive Demonstrations: Beatings, Expulsions of Venezuelans, Arbitrary Detentions", 10 March 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/10/colombia-abuses-amid-massive-demonstrations

177 Temblores, Plataforma Grita: *Reporte de casos de violencia policial en Colombia entre enero 1 y junio 30 de 2024*, 4 September 2024, www.temblores.org/post/reporte-de-casos-de-violencia-policial-1er-semestre-2024-en-colombia#viewer-0z6ps52441; Temblores, *Plataforma Grita: Reporte de hechos de violencia policial en Colombia durante 2023*, 5 April 2024, www.temblores.org/post/reporte-grita-2023

178 For example, Contra Sentido, X, x.com/_contrasentido_/status/1766251588975227112?t=OnX7wuBhwT4bvIKRyEIt-A

179 Letter from the Colombian Ministry of Defense to Amnesty International, Ref: GS-2024-004649-CODEH, 4 October 2024, on file, Spanish original:"la percepción de riesgo vs seguridad y el nivel de resistencia de la persona".

180 Axon, Letter to Amnesty International, February 2025, on file, see Annex 2.

181 For example, UN Register of Conventional Arms, unroca.org; Arms Trade Treaty reporting, thearmstradetreaty.org/annual-reports.html?templateId=209826; and domestic national annual reports, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), National reports on arms exports, sipri.org/databases/national-reports

Security trade fairs which promote law enforcement equipment can provide a window onto this opaque trade. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, 88 trade fairs across all regions - over three-quarters of trade fairs for which full exhibitor lists were available - were attended by companies known to manufacture or promote goods which she would consider prohibited under the UN Convention Against Torture.[182] Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation have previously documented the promotion of electric shock items the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture considers prohibited at trade fairs in Brazil, the UK and France.[183] In 2023, Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation documented the display and promotion of direct contact electric shock law enforcement equipment in the Milipol trade fair in Paris, including direct contact electric shock stun guns, stun batons and stun gloves marketed for sale by Chinese, Czech and French companies.[184]

Various types of electric shock equipment on display in a cabinet in a German security fair © Omega Research Foundation

The Milipol trade fair's organisers, Civipol and Comexposium, removed promotional material advertising the goods prohibited under the Council Regulation (EC) No. 1236/2005 (The EU Anti-Torture Regulation - see below), but did not attempt to curtail promotion of the direct contact electric shock weapons which are currently controlled, not prohibited under EU law. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture wrote a formal letter to the French Government highlighting her concerns, writing that irrespective of current EU law, she considers direct contact electric shock weapons to be "de facto modern tools of torture" and that their manufacture, promotion and sale would represent a violation of the French government's human rights obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture and related instruments.[185]

182 UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report, Annex 3, p. 11, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/annex-iii-document-august-2023-ae-18-09-23.pdf

183 Clarion Defence & Security Limited, "Event News: DSEI Compliance Notice – Friday 13 September 2019"; The Morning Star, "Exclusive: Arms fair ejects company over 'electro shock device'", 17 September 2019, morningstaronline.co.uk/article/b/arms-fair-ejects-company-over-electro-shock-device

184 The equipment documented included direct contact electric shock batons, direct contact electric shock gloves, and direct contact electric shock stun guns.

185 Special Rapporteur on Torture, Ref: AL FRA 4/2024, 18 June 2024, spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29174/

Left: The G.L.O.V.E. (Generated Low Output Voltage Emitter), a glove which delivers electric shocks on contact marketed for sale on The Squad Group Ltd's website © Private; Right: E-Band Restrictor being demonstrated to UK police officers at a seminar in Gibraltar, 2023 © Omega Foundation

In September 2024, Amnesty International UK and the Omega Research Foundation documented the promotion by The Squad Group Ltd of a direct contact electric shock glove which delivers painful electric shocks at the Emergency Services Show at the Birmingham National Exhibition Centre, as well as a body-worn electric shock device, the "E-Band Restrictor", on its website.[186] Omega and Amnesty UK also uncovered footage of the company demonstrating this equipment to police officers in Gibraltar.[187] The company has since removed refences to the "E-Band Restrictor" from its website.[188]

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMPANIES

There is a clear global consensus that companies have a responsibility to respect all human rights wherever they operate or export their products or services, as reflected in the UN Guiding Principles.[189] This responsibility exists over and above obligations to comply with national laws and regulations.[190]

The corporate responsibility to respect human rights requires companies to conduct human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, and mitigate any actual or potential involvement in human rights abuses.[191] Companies manufacturing and supplying law enforcement goods and services should implement human rights due diligence policies and processes beyond those generally undertaken as part of government licensing assessments and address the adverse human rights impacts of their products and services throughout their entire value chain, from the point of origin to the end user.[192] These impacts include, but are not limited to, the risk of

186 Amnesty International (with Omega Research Foundation), "UK: company run by retired police officers promoting electric-shock torture equipment", 19 September 2024, www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-company-run-retired-police-officers-promoting-electric-shock-torture-equipment; The Squad Group Ltd, "The G.L.O.V.E", www.the-squad.co.uk/glove Since Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation revealed the marketing of the "E-Band Restrictor", the product was removed from the company's website.

187 Amnesty International UK (with Omega Research Foundation), "UK: company run by retired police officers…" (previously cited).

188 For full company response, see Annex 2.

189 OHCHR, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework (UN Guiding Principles), UN Doc. HR/PUB/11/04, 2011, Principles 11 and 14; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, 31 May 2018, mneguidelines.oecd.org/OECD-Due-Diligence-Guidance-for-Responsible-Business-Conduct.pdf, pp. 16-17.

190 UN Guiding Principles, (previously cited), Commentary to Principle 11.

191 UN Guiding Principles, Commentary to Principle 17.

192 UN Guiding Principles, Principle 15.

misuse of products and services by third parties and the risk of research into and development of new technologies which may not be able to be used in compliance with international human rights law and standards. The standard of human rights due diligence required is heightened with respect to business activity impacting conflict-affected areas.[193]

A company can be involved in human rights abuses through its own activities or upon having its operations, products, or services directly linked to abuses through a business relationship.[194] The term "directly linked" is defined to exclude extremely loose connections to a company's operations, products or services. A human rights harm may be directly linked to a company's products via indirect business relationships beyond the first tier.[195] Where a company has identified that its products or services are directly linked to human rights abuses, it should use its leverage with those relationships to mitigate the harm to the greatest extent possible including by inserting clauses into their contractual relations that prohibit unauthorized use and mandate downstream human rights due diligence.[196] If a company cannot prevent or adequately mitigate risks of adverse human rights impacts, it should take action to increase its leverage or otherwise consider ceasing the supply of the relevant goods or services in a responsible manner and halting or restricting research and development into high-risk technologies.[197]

In line with the conclusions of the UN Special Rapporteur of Torture's thematic report on the torture trade, companies producing direct contact electric shock equipment should immediately cease production and destroy and decommission any stocks of prohibited goods, including direct contact electric shock weapons and equipment.[198] Those companies producing PESWs should remove the direct contact "drive stun" mode from all future models and cease production of models which have this mode. They should also carry out human rights due diligence on all transfers of PESWs and cease all transfers where there is a clear risk that the company's goods could be used for torture or other ill-treatment, irrespective of whether their home state licenses such transfers.

Where a company has identified that its products or services are directly linked to human rights abuses, it should use its leverage with those relationships to mitigate the harm to the greatest extent possible including by inserting clauses into their contractual relations that prohibit unauthorized use and mandate downstream human rights due diligence.

193 United Nations Development Programme, Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence for business in conflict-affected contexts: A Guide, 2022, www.undp.org/publications/heightened-human-rights-due-diligence-business-conflict-affected-contexts-guide.

194 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Commentary to Principle 13.

195 Expert letters and statements on the application of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in the context of the financial sector, Note by the Chair of the Negotiations on the 2011 Revision of the Guidelines, regarding the Terminology on "Directly Linked", June 2014, mneguidelines.oecd.org/global-forum/GFRBC-2014-financial-sector-document-3.pdf.

196 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Principle 19 and Commentary.

197 UN Guiding Principles, Principle 19 and Commentary.

198 UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 24 August 2023, UN Doc. A/78/324, para 83 (c).

4.4 EXISTING TRADE REGULATION

While there is a lack of global controls on the production of and trade in electric shock weapons and devices, the EU and some states, including the USA and the UK, have introduced some regulations. The Committee of Ministers of the 46-state-strong Council of Europe has adopted a formal Recommendation on measures against the trade in goods used for the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the African human rights system has supported regulation in this area.

REGIONAL CONTROLS

EU ANTI-TORTURE REGULATION

European Council (EC) Regulation No. 1236/2005 *Concerning trade in goods which could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment* (the EU Anti-Torture Regulation) – entered into force in July 2006 and remains the only legally-binding multilateral instrument addressing the trade in law enforcement weapons and equipment that can be used for torture or other ill-treatment.[199]

The Regulation establishes an EU-wide prohibition of the trade (import, export, transit) into, from, and through, all EU member states of products with "no practical use other than for the purpose of capital punishment or for the purpose of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment", as well as the trade of the principal components of such goods.[200] The Regulation prohibits the provision of related technical assistance, brokering of trade deals between third countries, and promotion of such goods at trade fairs or exhibitions, as well as on TV, radio, or the internet.

The list of such prohibited goods includes:

> **2.1. Electric shock devices which are intended to be worn on the body by a restrained individual, such as belts, sleeves and cuffs, designed for restraining human beings by the administration of electric shocks.[201]**

However, other types of direct contact electric shock weapons – including shock batons, electric shock shields and stun guns - are not prohibited, but controlled under the EU Anti-Torture Regulation. Member states "shall not grant any authorisation when there are reasonable grounds to believe that goods listed in Annex III [law enforcement equipment that can have a legitimate use] might be used for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".[202]

199 Official Journal of the European Union, *Regulation (EU) 2019/125 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 January 2019 concerning trade in certain goods which could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*, (Anti-Torture Regulation), 16 January 2019 [latest version], eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R0125&from=EN

200 The list of prohibited goods is provided in Annex II to the Regulation, already cited.

201 EU, Anti-Torture Regulation (previously cited), Annex II, 2.1.

202 EU, Anti-Torture Regulation (previously cited), Article 12.2; States are also required to notify other Member States and the Commission of any case where an export or transit authorization has been refused or annulled. Any State subsequently granting authorization for "essentially identical" transactions is required to inform the Commission and all Member States of its decision and reasons.

The list of such controlled goods includes:

2.1. Portable electric discharge weapons that can target only one individual each time an electric shock is administered, including but not limited to electric shock batons, electric shock shields, stun guns and electric shock dart guns[203]

2.2. Kits containing all essential components for assembly of portable electric discharge weapons controlled by item 2.1

2.3. Fixed or mountable electric discharge weapons that cover a wide area and can target multiple individuals with electrical shocks.[204]

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

In March 2021, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) adopted Recommendation CM/REC(2021)2 to member states on measures against the trade in goods used for the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. [205] The CoE Recommendation adopts a similar categorisation to the EU Anti-Torture Regulation, including goods that have no legitimate law enforcement purpose as well as law enforcement goods that are misused to inflict torture or other ill-treatment, with similar prohibited and controlled lists.[206]

In relation to controlled goods, the Recommendation calls on CoE member states to "ensure that the evaluation of export licences or transit applications incorporates an assessment of the risk that [controlled goods and equipment] will be diverted or used for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".[207] Certain CoE member states, notably Montenegro, North Macedonia and Switzerland, are currently engaged in developing and introducing new national measures in line with the Recommendation.[208]

THE AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

While there are currently no regional legally-binding controls on the torture trade in Africa, the necessity of such prohibitions and trade controls has long been recognized in the African human rights system, including in the Robben Island Guidelines for the Prohibition and Prevention of Torture in Africa.[209] In 2020, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights stressed the importance of a robust

203 Excluding "individual electronic shock devices when accompanying their user for the user's own personal protection", EU, Anti-Torture Regulation (previously cited), Annex III, 2.1, Notes, 2.

204 EU, Anti-Torture Regulation (previously cited), Annex III, 2.1-2.3

205 Council of Europe (CoE), *Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on measures against the trade in goods used for the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*, Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2021 at the 1400th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a1f4e5

206 CoE, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)2* (previously cited), Appendix 1 List of prohibited inherently abusive goods and equipment includes "iv.body-worn electric shock devices such as belts, sleeves and cuffs designed for restraining human beings by the administration of electric shocks." Appendix III List of controlled goods includes: "ii. portable electric discharge weapons that can target only one individual each time an electric shock is administered, including but not limited to electric shock batons, electric shock shields, stun guns and electric shock dart guns, and kits containing the essential components for assembly of such portable discharge weapons"; iii. "fixed or mountable electric discharge weapons that cover a wide area and can target multiple individuals with electric shocks".

207 CoE, Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)2 (previously cited), paragraph 3.2.2

208 Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), "Compilation of replies received from member States1 to the Questionnaire on the examination of the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)2…", 12 November 2024, 1680b21b06, pp. 26, 28, 37.

209 The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Robben Island Guidelines for the Prohibition and Prevention of Torture in Africa, adopted in October 2002, achpr.au.int/index.php/ar/node/600, p. 27, Article 14.

regional response in a resolution on the prohibition of the use, production, export and trade of tools used for torture.[210] In May 2023, the Commission for the Prevention of Torture in Africa (CPTA) organized an awareness raising panel at the African Commission Open Session in Banjul, where the Commission launched *Report on the Production, Trade, and use of Tools of Torture in Africa* , authored by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Omega Research Foundation and which includes examples of electric shock equipment manufactured and promoted in Africa.[211]

NATIONAL CONTROLS

USA

The USA has established wide-ranging national measures that incorporate both a prohibition on inherently abusive goods and trade controls on law enforcement equipment that can be misused for human rights violations including torture and other ill-treatment.[212] Since 1995, US export controls have included a category for "'specially designed' implements of torture.[213] This type of equipment is subject to a policy of denial for commercial exports to all destinations, which has been codified in the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) 742.11 (15 CFR 742.11).[214] While this category includes "thumbscrews, thumbcuffs, fingercuffs, [and] spiked batons", it does not include electric shock weapons. [215]

Electric shock weapons are covered in the Commerce Control List. The main relevant categories include:

- ECCN 0A503: Discharge type arms; non-lethal or less-lethal grenades and projectiles, and "specially designed" "parts" and "components" of those projectiles; and devices to administer electric shock, for example, stun guns, shock batons, shock shields, electric cattle prods, immobilization guns and projectiles.
- ECCN 0A982: law enforcement restraint devices including stun cuffs; shock belts; shock sleeves.

210 African Commission, Resolution on the prohibition of the use, production, export and trade of tools used for torture. ACHPR/Res.472 (LXVII) 2020.

211 The Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Africa (CPTA), *Report on the Production, Trade, and use of Tools of Torture in Africa*, 20 December 2023, achpr.au.int/en/special-mechanisms-reports/report-production-trade-and-use-tools-torture-africa

212 For a civil society analysis see: Amnesty International USA, American Civil Liberties Union and National Religious Campaign Against Torture*, Comments by US-Based NGOs on United States Regulations of the Production and Trade of Law Enforcement Equipment and Weapons*, Submission to Special Rapporteur on Torture: Call for Inputs Input for the report on the nature, scope and regulation of the production and trade of law enforcement equipment and weapons and the relationship with torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 28 April 2023, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/cfi-ga78/ngos/submission-srtorture-ga78-cso-AIUSA-ACLU-NRCAT.pdf

213 US Department of Commerce, Federal Register, Vol. 60, No. 228, 28 November 1995, Foreign Policy Controls: Specially Designed Implements of Torture, pp. 58512-4, www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1995-11-28/pdf/95-28887.pdf; US Bureau of Industry and Security, *The Commerce Control List*, Supplement No. 1 to part 774, Category 0. ECCN 0A983, www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/documents/regulations-docs/2331-category-0-nuclear-materials-facilities-equipment-and-miscellaneous-items-1/file

214 US National Archives, Code of Federal Regulations, Export Administration Regulations, Part 742 – Control Policy. 15 CFR § 742.11 – Specially designed implements of torture, including thumbscrews, thumbcuffs, fingercuffs, spiked batons, and parts and accessories, n.e.s., EAR 742.11 (15 CFR 742.11), www.ecfr.gov/current/title-15/subtitle-B/chapter-VII/subchapter-C/part-742/section-742.11

215 US Bureau of Industry and Security, *The Commerce Control List* (previously cited), Supplement No. 1 to part 774, Category 0. ECCN 0A983

The USA requires a human rights review for the export of items specifically listed in the Commerce Control List (CCL).[216] In 2020, the United States Bureau of Industry and Security issued a notice indicating that all items in the CCL could be subject to human rights assessment.[217]

UNITED KINGDOM

On exiting the EU, the UK incorporated the Council Regulation (EC) No. 1236/2005 (EU Anti-Torture Regulation - see above) into its domestic legislation, prohibiting goods which have no practical use other than for the purposes of capital punishment, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and controlling goods that could be used for the purpose of torture or other ill-treatment. Secondary legislation, The Export Control (Security and Para-military Goods) Order 2003, as amended in 2008, provides a more extended list of prohibited electric shock items, including some items, such as electric shock stun guns and batons, that are currently only controlled under the EU Anti-Torture Regulation.[218] Taken together, the UK prohibits the import, export, possession, promotion and other brokering of direct contact and body-worn electric shock devices, as well as parts and components of these devices. Current guidance published by the Export Control Joint Unit confirms these categories of goods are subject to comprehensive trading prohibitions.[219]

4.5 THE NEED FOR A TORTURE-FREE TRADE TREATY

The need for global regulation on the trade in law enforcement equipment that can be used for torture or other ill-treatment has long been recognized in the reports of successive UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture, and in the UN General Assembly Torture resolution.[220] To further these goals, the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade was created in 2017 co-chaired by the European Union, Argentina and Mongolia to end the trade in goods used to carry out torture and capital punishment. The Alliance currently has 63 members.[221]

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216 US Bureau of Industry and Security, Commerce Control List Overview and the Country Chart, Part 738, www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/documents/regulations-docs/federal-register-notices/federal-register-2014/1033-738-supp-1/file For example, applications to export items controlled for "crime control" reasons under US law (which includes, for example, rubber bullets) "will generally be considered favorably on a case-by-case basis, unless there is civil disorder in the country or region or unless there is a risk that the items will be used to violate or abuse human rights", Export Administration Regulations§ 742.7(b)(1). See also the submission of Amnesty International USA, the American Civil Liberties Union, and National Religious Campaign Against Torture (previously cited).

217 Federal Register. *Amendment to Licensing Policy for Items Controlled for Crime Control Reasons: A Rule by the Industry and Security Bureau on 10/06/2020*, www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/10/06/2020-21815/amendment-to-licensing-policy-for-items-controlled-for-crime-control-reasons

218 UK Government, Export of Goods, Transfer of Technology and Provision of Technical Assistance (Control) Order 2003, PL5001, (d), (f), (g) and (h), 2003 (amended 2008), www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/2764/schedule/1/2009-01-02

219 UK Government, "Guidance: Export controls: torture and capital punishment goods", www.gov.uk/guidance/controls-on-torture-goods

220 For example, UN General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution 74/143: Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted on 18 December 2019, UN Doc. A/RES/74/143. Human Rights Council; UN Special Rapporteur on the question of torture, Report: Civil and Political Rights, Including the Questions of Torture and Detention, 15 December 2004, E/CN.4/2005/62; UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Report: Extra-custodial use of force and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 21 July 2017, A/72/178, para. 59

221 Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, North Macedonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malta, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Seychelles, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Vanuatu and the European Union.

Activists gather at an international summit on Torture-Free Trade held in the UK in Shoreditch, London, January 2023
© Amnesty International

At the initiative of the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade, the General Assembly adopted in 2019 Resolution 73/304 asking the Secretary-General to (1) prepare a report on 'Towards torture-free trade: examining the feasibility, scope and parameters for possible common international standards' and (2) to set up a group of governmental experts (GGE) to examine the feasibility, scope of the goods to be included and draft parameters for a range of options to establish common international standards on the matter.[222]

The GGE report was finalised in June 2022 and recommended the development of either (1) a legally binding instrument controlling goods that either have no practical use other than for torture or other ill-treatment or which could be used for such practices, or (2) non-binding measures, such as Guiding Principles covering both torture and death penalty goods. The Report also recommended that the UNGA could establish an expert Working Group to take the work forward.[223]

In parallel, non-governmental organizations from around the globe have joined forces as a part of the Torture-Free Trade Network, which issued the Shoreditch Declaration in January 2023 calling for a robust, global, legally-binding Torture-Free Trade Treaty.[224] The Network now comprises over 80 non-governmental organisations. In September 2022, Amnesty International, working with the International Human Rights Clinic of Harvard Law School, the Centre for Victims of Torture (CVT) and the Omega Research Foundation, outlined in detail how such a treaty could function in *Essential Elements of a Torture-Free Trade Treaty*.[225]

222 UN Secretary General, *Towards torture-free trade: examining the feasibility, scope and parameters for possible common international standards*, UN Doc. A/74/969, 28 July 2020.

223 UN Secretary General, *Towards torture-free trade: examining the feasibility, scope and parameters for possible common international standards - Report of the Group of Governmental experts*, UN Doc. A/76/850, 30 May 2022.

224 Various NGOs, The Shoreditch Declaration for a Torture-Free Trade Treaty, January 2023, humanrightsclinic.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Shoreditch-Declaration-ENG.pdf

225 Amnesty International, the Omega Research Foundation and the International Human Rights Clinic of Harvard Law School, *Essential Elements of a Torture-Free Trade Treaty*, (Index: IOR 40/5977/2022), 23 September 2022, amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/IOR4059772022ENGLISH.pdf

In October 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture presented a thematic report at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly which analysed the global trade in weapons, equipment and devices used by law enforcement and other public authorities that are capable of inflicting torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.[226] The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture's report included two preliminary, non-exhaustive annexes, the first identifying specific types of law enforcement equipment which were inherently abusive and should be prohibited;[227] and the second identifying law enforcement equipment that could be readily misused for torture or other ill-treatment and whose trade should be stringently controlled.[228] The report also supported the negotiation of a legally-binding international instrument to regulate the trade in these goods.[229]

On 23 June 2023, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated: "I am fully supportive of all efforts to limit trade in items that could be used for torture, including through a new international torture-free trade treaty."[230] In April 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions called on all states to adopt a Torture-Free Trade Treaty.[231]

Together, these initiatives provide clear support and a detailed roadmap for the negotiation of future global, legally-binding prohibitions and controls on the production of and trade in law enforcement equipment that can be used for torture and other ill-treatment.

CONCLUSION

Currently, almost all states allow the production of and trade in direct contact electric shock weapons, such as stun guns, batons and shields, which the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture considers to be inherently abusive. National and regional laws and standards on the trade in law enforcement equipment need to be strengthened. The sustainable way to more effectively regulate production and trade in these goods is, however, through the negotiation of a global Torture-Free Trade Treaty which would prohibit inherently abusive law enforcement goods, such as direct contact electric shock equipment; and establish global, human rights-based trade controls on law enforcement goods that could be used for torture or other ill-treatment, such as PESWs.

226 UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 24 August 2023, UN Doc. A/78/324.

227 UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Interim Report (previously cited), Annex 1: Category A Goods: Prohibited Equipment that is Inherently Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/annex-i-document-august-2023-ae-18-09-23.pdf

228 UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Interim Report (previously cited), Annex 2, Category B Goods: Equipment that should be controlled, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/annex-ii-document-august-2023-18-09-23.pdf

229 UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Interim Report (previously cited), para. 20.

230 OHCHR, "High Commissioner honours victims of torture", 23 June 2023, www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/06/high-commissioner-honours-victims-torture

231 OHCHR, "UN experts call for international torture-free trade agreement", 29 April 2024, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-call-international-torture-free-trade-agreement

5. LEGAL ARGUMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The use of both direct contact electric shock weapons and PESWs has been subject to extensive legal commentary by human rights mechanisms, including the UN Committee against Torture, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, as well as regional courts and torture prevention bodies. There is growing consensus that the production, trade and use of direct contact electric shock equipment used for law enforcement should be prohibited. Many human rights bodies and regional courts have concluded that the use of PESWs must be restricted to situations in which there is a threat to life or risk of serious injury; they have also expressed concerns about the use of PESWs against vulnerable groups – such as children, pregnant women, older people and those suffering mental health crises – and called on states not to store PESWs in places of detention or mental health institutions.

5.1 PROHIBTIONS ON DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

As mentioned above, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has argued that direct contact electric shock weapons – including the use of PESWs in "drive stun" mode - are inherently cruel and degrading and should therefore be considered to be prohibited.[232] This follows statements by other human rights bodies expressing concerns about the use of this equipment. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) - a torture prevention body of the Council of Europe (CoE) which visits places of detention in member states - has expressed "strong reservations" about the use of electric shock weapons in direct contact mode reasoning that "properly trained law enforcement officials will have many other control techniques available to them when they are in touching distance of a person who has to be brought under control".[233] According to guidance from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Electric shock equipment displayed by a Chinese company at Milipol 2017 © Omega Research Foundation

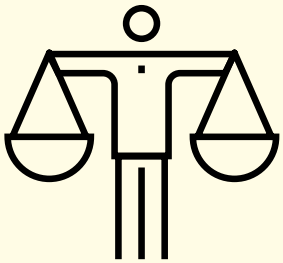
232 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Thematic study on the global trade in weapons, equipment and devices used by law enforcement and other public authorities that are capable of inflicting torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, A/78/324, ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78324-thematic-study-global-trade-weapons-equipment-and-devices-used

233 CPT, Standards, Substantive sections of the CPT's General Reports, (CPT/Inf/E (2002) 1 – Rev 2015), p. 111, para. 78.

(UNODC) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) "there is no tactical utility [in electric shock stun guns, shields, belts and batons] … that cannot be achieved with another device, and the risk of arbitrary force amounting to torture or other forms of ill-treatment is too great. As such, their use is not advised."[234]

Regarding body-worn electric shock devices, the CPT has called for a prohibition on the use of "stun belt or similar devices" describing them as "inherently degrading".[235] In 2000, the UN Committee against Torture urged the USA to "abolish electro-shock stun belts and restraint chairs as methods of restraining those in custody; their use almost invariably leads to breaches of article 16 [prevention of acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment] of the Convention". [236]

PESW CASES IN THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS



In the case of *V v. Czech Republic* (2024), involving the use of a Taser by police officers against a person in a mental health facility, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) recognized that while the use of a Taser did not amount to intrinsically lethal force, it was nonetheless likely to cause death, particularly considering the circumstances of the victim who was a patient in a mental health facility, and who was likely under medication.[237] Accordingly, the use of a Taser must engage the State's positive obligation to adopt regulations for the protection of life and ensure the effective implementation and functioning of that regulatory framework.[238] It also emphasized the need for more specific guidelines regulating the use of PESWs in various contexts, noting that application of the general principle of proportionality did not constitute adequate guidance on the use of the weapons.[239]

In *Kanciał v.* Poland (2019), the ECtHR found that the use of a PESW as a direct contact device during arrest violated the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. In this case, a taser was repeatedly used in "drive stun" mode against the applicant during his arrest, allegedly after failing to comply with an order.[240] The applicant's subsequent reports to the authorities about the ill-treatment he underwent were also not effectively investigated. Given the nature of the applicant's injuries and the associated physical and mental suffering, the ECtHR found that "the treatment in question during the period following the applicant's immobilisation amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment."[241]

234 UNODC and OHCHR, *Resource book on the use of force and firearms in law enforcement*, UN Doc. HR/PUB/17/6, 2017, p. 94.
235 CPT, 20th General Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, CPT/Inf(2010)28, 26 October 2010, para. 74.
236 UN Committee against Torture, Reports: Twenty-third session (8-19 November 1999) Twenty-fourth session (1-19 May 2000), UN Doc. A/55/44, digitallibrary.un.org/record/424485/files/A_55_44-EN.pdf?ln=en, para. 180 (c); see also CPT, 20th General Report (previously cited), para. 74.
237 ECtHR, *V v. Czech Republic*, Application No 26074/18, Judgment of 7 March 2024, para. 99.
238 ECtHR, *V v. Czech Republic* (previously cited), para. 102.
239 ECtHR, *V v. Czech Republic*, para. 104.
240 ECtHR, *Kanciał v. Poland*, Application No. 37023/13, Judgment of 23 May 2019, paras 93-96.
241 ECtHR, *Kanciał v. Poland* (previously cited), para 81.

5.2 REGULATING THE USE OF PESWs

UN and regional human rights bodies have stressed that there should be a high threshold of use for PESWs. In the UN Committee against Torture's concluding observations on Austria on 12 June 2024, the Committee urged Austria to "…take all measures necessary to effectively ensure that the use of electrical discharge weapons (Tasers) is strictly compliant with the principles of necessity, subsidiarity, proportionality, advance warning (where feasible) and precaution and that they are used *exclusively in extreme and limited situations, in which there is a real and immediate threat to life or risk of serious injury*, as a substitute for lethal weapons and by trained law enforcement personnel only" (emphasis added).[242] Similar language has been used by the CPT.[243]

UN bodies have also stressed the dangers of the use of PESWs against vulnerable groups, including children, older people, people with underlying medical conditions, pregnant women, people suffering mental health crises. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Committee against Torture have recommended the prohibition of the use of PESWs on children.[244] The UN Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice recommends that states "prohibit the use of firearms, electric shock weapons and violent methods to apprehend and arrest children" and instead "adopt measures and procedures that carefully limit and guide the use of force and instruments of restraint by the police".[245] Likewise, the UN Committee against Torture has recommended Finland to prohibit the use of PESWs against pregnant women and children.[246] The CPT has said that the use of PESWs should be avoided against young children, along with pregnant women and persons with a pre-existing heart condition.[247]

THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TORTURE

HAS ARGUED THAT **DIRECT CONTACT ELECTRIC SHOCK WEAPONS** – INCLUDING THE USE OF PESWs IN **"DRIVE STUN"** MODE ARE

INHERENTLY CRUEL AND DEGRADING

AND SHOULD THEREFORE BE CONSIDERED PROHIBITED ✗

242 UN Committee against Torture, Concluding observations on the 7th periodic report of Austria, CAT/C/AUT/CO/7, 12 June 2024, para. 41.

243 CPT, Report to the Polish Government on the visit to Poland carried out from 11 to 22 May 2017, CPT/Inf (2018) 39, rm.coe.int/16808c7a91, para. 22.

244 Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, 12 July 2016, para. 40 (a); UN Committee Against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report of Finland, CAT/C/FIN/CO/7, 20 January 2017, para. 27 and Committee Against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Combined Third to Fifth Periodic Reports of the United States of America, CAT/C/USA/CO/3-5, 19 December 2014, para. 27.

245 UN Secretariat, United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, UN Doc. A/C.3/69/L.5, 25 September 2014, digitallibrary.un.org/record/780633?ln=en&v=pdf

246 UN Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report of Finland (previously cited), para. 27. documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g17/010/32/pdf/g1701032.pdf

247 CPT, 20th General Report (previously cited), para. 79.

Staff take part in a demonstration showing an in-flight scenario at the Cabin Crew Training Center in South Korea, Seoul, 27 June 2024 © Anthony Wallace/AFP via Getty Images

In 2017, the UN Committee against Torture expressed concerns in relation to incidents in the Netherlands in which TASERs were used against minors and persons with mental disabilities in health-care settings. The Committee called on the Netherlands to "explicitly prohibit the use of electrical discharge weapons and pepper spray against vulnerable persons, including minors and pregnant women, and in health-care settings, including mental health institutions, and especially prohibit the use of electrical discharge weapons in custodial settings".[248]

Human rights bodies have expressed concerns about the storage and use of PESWs in places of detention. The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - a UN torture prevention body which conducts country visits and was established by the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture - recommended that "the use of electrical discharge weapons and chemical agents be banned in places of deprivation of liberty, in favour of effective de-escalation techniques" in its report on Australia in 2023. [249] In 2022, the CPT recommended that the Portuguese authorities take steps to ensure that "the presence of electrical discharge weapons (and all other potentially lethal weapons) inside custody areas is expressly prohibited".[250]

248 UN Committee against Torture Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the Netherlands, CAT/C/NLD/CO/7, 18 December 2018, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/442/89/pdf/g1844289.pdf; see also UN Committee against Torture, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CAT/C/GBR/CO/6), 7 June 2019, para. 29.

249 UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Visit to Australia undertaken from 16 to 23 October 2022: recommendations and observations addressed to the State party, CAT/OP/AUS/ROSP/1, 20 December 2023.

250 CPT, Report to the Portuguese Government on the CPT visit to Portugal carried out from 23 May to 3 June 2022, CPT/Inf (2023) 35, 9 June 2023.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE RIGHT TO REMEDY

The principle of accountability is an important component of the protection of the right to life[251] and the right to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment.[252] It is founded on Article 2(3) of the ICCPR which requires states parties to ensure that persons whose rights are violated '… have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in official capacity.'[253] Whenever law enforcement officials use force which results in injury or death, an investigation that meets the standards set out in the Minnesota Protocol[254] and the Istanbul Protocol[255] must be conducted.[256] In many of its concluding observations, the UN Human Rights Committee has called on states to conduct investigations into cases of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials and ensure that victims receive remedies.[257] Similarly, in General Comment 3 on the right to life under the African Charter, the African Commission has stated that "States must take steps both to prevent arbitrary deprivations of life and to conduct prompt, impartial, thorough and transparent investigations into any such deprivations…holding those responsible to account and providing for an effective remedy and reparation for the victims."[258] States must provide or facilitate prompt and effective reparation, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition, for harms caused by the use electric shock equipment by law enforcement or other public officials.[259] Rehabilitation of survivors of torture and other ill-treatment, including those subjected to electric shock by law enforcement or other public officials, must include access to quality healthcare to address any long-term physical and/or mental health problems.[260] Any company that identifies that it has contributed to such human rights harm should provide for or cooperate in remediation through legitimate processes..[261]

251 Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, A/HRC/26/36, para. 78; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), General Comment 36: Right to Life (Article 6), 3 September 2019, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para 27.

252 Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Nils Melzer, A/76/168.

253 ICCPR, Article 2 (3). See also UN General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution 60/147: *Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation*, adopted on 16 December 2005, UN Doc. A/RES/60/147.

254 OHCHR, *The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death* (2016), UN Doc. HR/PUB/17/4.

255 OHCHR, *Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, Professional Training Series No. 8/Rev. 2, 2022,

256 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, General Comment 36 on the right to life (Article 6), UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para 19.

257 UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations, Mauritania, CCPR/C/MRT/CO/2, para. 45.

258 ACHPR, General Comment 3 on the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: The Right to Life (Article 4), 18 November 2015, para. 7.

259 Basic principles and guidelines on the right to a remedy and reparation for victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, UN Doc A/RES/60/147, paras 18-23.

260 Committee against Torture, General Comment 3: Implementation of Article 14 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment by States parties, 13 December 2012, UN Doc. CAT/C/GC/3, paras 12-3.

261 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Principle 22.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

In the concluding paragraph of her thematic report on the torture trade, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture imagines a world "where all inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading equipment used by law enforcement and other public officials was no longer in the hands of untrained officers or ruthless leaders, because its manufacture and trade had been banned". In this world "responsible exporters and government regulators" would "halt the export of certain equipment when there is evidence that such equipment is being misused to torture, harm or repress political opponents or citizens exercising their rights to assemble and express themselves". Such steps would represent "a significant victory for human rights".[262]

The best way of ensuring coordinated, global action is taken on this issue is through the negotiation, and effective implementation, of a Torture-Free Trade Treaty. Only then can there be a set of agreed, global, legally-binding provisions aimed at tackling the production of inherently abusive law enforcement equipment, such as direct contact electric shock equipment, and imposing human rights-based controls on the trade in law enforcement equipment that can be used in compliance with international law and standards on the use of force, such as PESWs.

International bodies have consistently underscored the potential for electric shock weapons to be used in ways that violate human rights, including the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, the right to life, and the right of peaceful assembly. Amnesty International, civil society organizations, UN torture prevention bodies and others continue to document the abuse of electric shock equipment by law enforcement in all regions of the world.

THE BEST WAY OF **ENSURING COORDINATED, GLOBAL ACTION IS TAKEN ON THIS ISSUE** IS THROUGH THE NEGOTIATION, AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION, OF A

TORTURE-FREE TRADE TREATY

262 UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report (previously cited) 24 August 2023, UN Doc. A/78/324, para. 86.

Security forces equipped with electric shock batons face protesters during an anti-war protest in Moscow, Russia, 6 March 2022. Several peaceful protesters subsequently received electric shocks, as security forces clamped down on the demonstration. © Stringer/ Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

In line with the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Torture, the use of direct contact electric shock weapons – including the "drive stun" mode found on most models of PESWs - is inherently cruel and degrading and must be prohibited in all circumstances. In relation to PESWs used as stand-off weapons, states must strictly control the trade in these goods to law enforcement agencies to ensure they are not used in the commission of torture or other-ill-treatment. States must also have in place robust regulations on human rights-compliant use, ensure that law enforcement officials are properly trained, and establish independent oversight mechanisms to investigate and address any incidents of misuse, including providing for an effective remedy and reparation for the victims.

Companies producing electric shock equipment have responsibility to respect human rights and prevent harms their products and services are directly linked to, even if they do not directly contribute to those harms. They should therefore implement robust human rights due diligence and mitigation measures to ensure their products and services are not being systematically misused for torture or other ill-treatment. In line with the conclusions of the UN Special Rapporteur of Torture's thematic report on the torture trade, they should also cease production of direct contact electric shock equipment, destroy existing stock of this type of equipment and remove the direct contact "drive stun" mode from all future PESW models.

In December 2024 - the 40th anniversary of the UN Convention Against Torture - over 50 survivors of torture and other ill-treatment issued a statement saying: "Torture is designed to break bodies, minds, and the human spirit – we bear the long-lasting physical and psychological scars of that cruelty – and the tools used to inflict it must no longer be freely produced, sold, or traded with impunity. Nobody should have to suffer the pain that we have endured."[263] Only though global, legally-binding regulation can the human costs of the untrammelled "torture trade" be finally addressed.

263 Amnesty International, Center for Victims against Torture, "Joint Declaration from Torture Survivors in Support of a Torture-Free Trade Treaty", 6 December 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/IOR5188262024ENGLISH.pdf; full statement: www.cvt.org/statements/joint-declaration-from-torture-survivors-in-support-of-a-torture-free-trade-treaty/

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO STATES

The production of and trade in electric shock weapons:

- Prohibit the production, promotion, transfer, use and provision of technical assistance/training, of all direct contact electric shock weapons and equipment used for law enforcement including, but not limited to, stun guns, electric shock batons and shields, stun gloves and body-worn electric shock devices (e.g. remotely controlled electric shock cuffs, vests and belts).
- Establish a timetable to destroy and decommission any stocks of prohibited goods, in line with recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.
- Prohibit the use of the direct contact "drive stun" mode on PESWs in all circumstances; require the removal of the "drive stun" mode from all future PESWs models and disable this function from models currently in circulation or remove them from use.
- Introduce strict, human-rights based trade controls on all transfers of PESWs, prohibiting their transfer where there is a clear risk that they will be used for torture or other ill-treatment. Competent authorities should consider a range of relevant factors in this assessment, including the recipient state's compliance with international human rights law and respect for the rule of law, and evidence of discrimination in the exercise of law enforcement or other criminal justice functions in the recipient state.

Support for UN/Regional initiatives

- Publicly support and actively work towards the creation of a global, legally-binding instrument – a Torture-Free Trade Treaty – that would prohibit the production of and trade in inherently abusive equipment, as well as related activities, and that would establish effective human rights safeguards to control the trade in law enforcement equipment that could be used for torture or other ill-treatment.
- Actively support the tabling of a resolution at the UN General Assembly to begin negotiations on such a treaty.
- Actively support regional efforts aimed at prohibiting the production of and trade in inherently abusive equipment, as well as related activities, and that would establish effective human rights safeguards to control the trade in law enforcement equipment that could be used for torture or other ill-treatment.
- Establish new, or strengthen existing, national production and trade controls on law enforcement equipment to bring them in line with the recommendations in the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture's thematic report on the torture trade and her two annexed lists of prohibited and controlled law enforcement equipment.

The use of PESWs

- Use in order to avoid the use of a firearm, at a threshold close to that which would be applied to the use of firearms, i.e. in situations involving a threat to life or of serious injury which cannot be contained by less extreme options.
- Where use is necessary, proportionate and lawful, PESWs should be discharged for the minimum period possible (normally 5 seconds). Any subsequent application should be separately justified. PESWs should not be used repeatedly, continuously or for an extended period.
- PESWs should not be introduced for ordinary day-to-day policing but reserved for specialised and well-trained units likely to be required to deal with threats of death or serious injury.
- Prohibit the use of PESWs for policing assemblies or other public order situations.
- Prohibit routine use of PESWs in detention settings or mental health institutions.
- Ensure use does not result in unnecessary and unwarranted injuries by avoiding aiming darts in close proximity of the heart and at sensitive parts of the body, including the face – particularly the eyes – neck, and genitalia; and prohibiting use of PESWs against persons in elevated positions, where there is a risk of significant secondary injury due to falls.
- Only use weapons that record each and every use; implement strict and timely public reporting and accountability measures in order to prevent increasing unlawful use of the weapon over time as a tool of convenience.
- Collect data disaggregated by age, sex, race, ethnicity, national origin, individuals suffering mental health issues, and other relevant factors on all use, or threats of use, of PESWs in order to proactively address discriminatory and disproportionate use of PESWs with concrete, evidence-based use of force policies and practices.
- Adopt measures to prevent and eliminate racist and discriminatory practices by law enforcement, including in the use of PESWs, and ensure that the victims of PESW misuse have access to justice, support and reparations.
- Institute comprehensive, regularly-reinforced training, including the potential risks involved in the use of a PESW, the high threshold of its use and real-world scenario-based exercises.

Access to health

- All persons subject to an electric shock from a PESW should be assessed at the earliest opportunity by a suitably qualified healthcare professional.
- Ensure all survivors of torture and other ill-treatment, including those subjected to electric shock by law enforcement officials or other public officials, have access to quality healthcare to address any long-term physical and/or mental health problems.

TO COMPANIES

- Immediately cease the production, promotion, export, import, sale, transfer of and provision of technical assistance and training for all direct contact electric shock weapons and equipment used for law enforcement including, but not limited to, stun guns, electric shock batons and shields, shock (stun) gloves, shock grabbing devices and body-worn electric shock devices (e.g. remotely controlled electric shock cuffs, vests and belts).
- Immediately cease the production, promotion, export, import, sale, transfer of and provision of technical assistance and training for all weapons and equipment used for law enforcement deemed by the Special Rapporteur on Torture to be inherently cruel, inhuman or degrading.
- Conduct human rights due diligence to identify, prevent and mitigate the human rights impacts of their products and services before, during and after transfer**.** Where a company cannot prevent or adequately mitigate risks of adverse human rights impacts directly linked to its products and services, it should take action to increase its leverage with the relevant business relationships or otherwise consider ceasing the supply of the relevant goods or services in a responsible manner, irrespective if such transfers are authorized by their home state.
- Remove direct contact ("drive stun") mode from all future PESWs models and cease production of models which have this mode.

ANNEX 1

Table 1.1 Estimated number of companies that manufacture or promote Category A (prohibited) electric shock equipment from January 2018 and June 2023 by equipment type and region[264]

Region/ Equipment type	Africa	Asia	Europe	Latin America	North America	Total
Body-worn electric shock devices	4	11	0	3	8	26
Direct contact electric shock devices	13	97	52	9	25	196

Table 1.2 Number of companies manufacturing and promoting electric shock weapons by electric shock weapon type, and by country, from 1 January 2019 - 31 December 2023[265]

	Body worn	Direct contact	Projectile
Africa	**4**	**13**	**4**
Cameroon		1	
Nigeria		1	
South Africa	4	10	3
Tanzania, United Republic of		1	
Tunisia			1
Asia	**10**	**111**	**26**
Bangladesh		1	
China	5	57	20

264 UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Interim report (previously cited), 24 August 2023, UN Doc. A/78/324, Annex 3, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/sr/annex-iii-document-august-2023-ae-18-09-23.pdf

265 The Omega Research Foundation, supporting data, as of February 2025, on file. Due to slightly different time scales, including more recent developments, these figures largely, but do not completely, align with those used by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.

	Body worn	Direct contact	Projectile
Cyprus		1	
India	2	20	
Indonesia		2	1
Israel		3	1
Kazakhstan		1	1
Korea, Republic of		8	
Malaysia	2	3	
Taiwan	1	12	2
Thailand		1	
United Arab Emirates		2	1
Europe	**1**	**48**	**9**
Belarus		1	
Bosnia and Herzegovina		1	
Bulgaria		1	
Croatia		1	
Czech Republic		1	
France		11	1
Germany		8	
Greece		1	
Hungary		1	
Poland		6	2

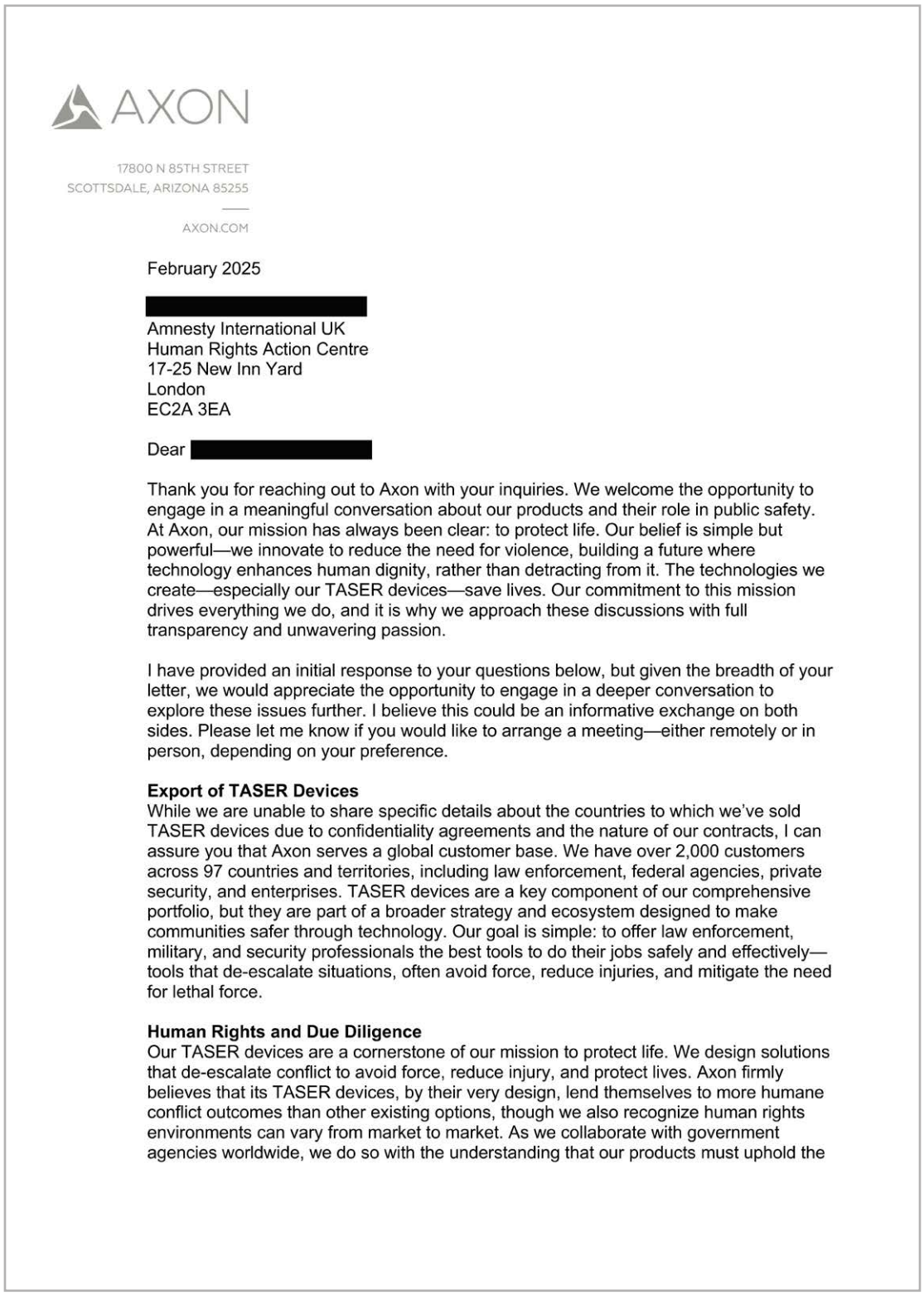
	Body worn	Direct contact	Projectile
Portugal		2	
Romania		1	
Russian Federation		5	3
Slovakia		1	
Slovenia		2	
Spain		1	2
Ukraine		2	
United Kingdom	1	2	1
Latin America and the Caribbean	**3**	**10**	**5**
Argentina		1	
Brazil	1	6	1
Dominican Republic			1
Mexico	1	2	2
Paraguay			1
Peru	1	1	
Northern America	**8**	**28**	**8**
Canada		2	1
United States	8	26	7
Total	**25**	**211**	**52**

ANNEX 2: COMPANY RESPONSES

Response from **Squad Group Ltd** received via email on 22 January 2025:

> *"The Squad Group Ltd is a company run by three former police officers with the aim of protecting serving officers and supporting retired ones.*
>
> *The company is demonstrating the GLOVE (Generated Low Output Voltage Emitter) only to Government law enforcement agencies within the UK, associated UK overseas territories and Ireland.*
>
> *The Squad Group Ltd are only seeking an operational trial for the GLOVE and have not undertaken any training with officers or Government officials to date."*

Response from **Axon Enterprise, Inc.** received via email 5 February 2025:



AXON

17800 N 85TH STREET
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA 85255

AXON.COM

February 2025

[redacted]
Amnesty International UK
Human Rights Action Centre
17-25 New Inn Yard
London
EC2A 3EA

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for reaching out to Axon with your inquiries. We welcome the opportunity to engage in a meaningful conversation about our products and their role in public safety. At Axon, our mission has always been clear: to protect life. Our belief is simple but powerful—we innovate to reduce the need for violence, building a future where technology enhances human dignity, rather than detracting from it. The technologies we create—especially our TASER devices—save lives. Our commitment to this mission drives everything we do, and it is why we approach these discussions with full transparency and unwavering passion.

I have provided an initial response to your questions below, but given the breadth of your letter, we would appreciate the opportunity to engage in a deeper conversation to explore these issues further. I believe this could be an informative exchange on both sides. Please let me know if you would like to arrange a meeting—either remotely or in person, depending on your preference.

Export of TASER Devices
While we are unable to share specific details about the countries to which we've sold TASER devices due to confidentiality agreements and the nature of our contracts, I can assure you that Axon serves a global customer base. We have over 2,000 customers across 97 countries and territories, including law enforcement, federal agencies, private security, and enterprises. TASER devices are a key component of our comprehensive portfolio, but they are part of a broader strategy and ecosystem designed to make communities safer through technology. Our goal is simple: to offer law enforcement, military, and security professionals the best tools to do their jobs safely and effectively—tools that de-escalate situations, often avoid force, reduce injuries, and mitigate the need for lethal force.

Human Rights and Due Diligence
Our TASER devices are a cornerstone of our mission to protect life. We design solutions that de-escalate conflict to avoid force, reduce injury, and protect lives. Axon firmly believes that its TASER devices, by their very design, lend themselves to more humane conflict outcomes than other existing options, though we also recognize human rights environments can vary from market to market. As we collaborate with government agencies worldwide, we do so with the understanding that our products must uphold the

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highest standards of ethical conduct. We believe the future of law enforcement must not only protect public safety, but also respect and preserve human integrity.

All Axon TASER devices delivered globally are subject to strict US Department of Commerce Export Administration Regulations (EAR) licensing. These export licenses articulate the end-user(s) abroad as well as their end-use. As a "crime control" regulated product under the EAR, every license is reviewed by US Department of State on US Foreign Policy, which includes US Foreign Policy Human Rights considerations. Axon takes seriously its adherence to all US Export controls, and exports its weapons only to approved end-users and end-uses under the EAR.

Beyond the US Governmental review of our global exports, Axon Ethics & Equity Advisory Council and relevant stakeholder groups are further involved with the responsible development and deployment of our technologies. The following principles guide our approach to the design of TASER devices:

- **Axon does not manufacture lethal weapons.** Our products are designed to de-escalate situations first with the goal of avoiding the need for force altogether. In fact, according to recent statistics out of the United States, England, Wales and Australia, simply displaying a TASER device gains compliance of subjects between 75-90% of the time without having to actually use force. This effective de-escalation technique is largely under-reported, but is being captured by agencies more often due to built-in data collection. Moreover, in the event de-escalation is not successful and force is necessary, TASER devices are designed and universally recognized as being less-lethal, meaning they are intended to minimize the risk of injury and save lives.
- **Data collection is built into our devices** to drive responsible use, create accountability, and allow for public transparency. TASER devices are the only use of force tool that track how and when the devices are used during an incident. We also offer data-driven training and education to help improve human performance in line with our technology. Data collection also allows us to continuously improve the safety, effectiveness and reliability of our products in the field.
- **Axon Promotes Robust Policy and Training.** Unlike other manufacturers of use of force tools, Axon takes a more active role in educating on the proper use of TASER devices through a recommended training curriculum. Although each agency must set its own use of force policies that are consistent with use of force standards in their region, Axon leverages TASER certification programs - both domestically and internationally - which consist of both online courses and in-person instruction. International users are instructed to comply with their country's use of force standards, which may include the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons.
- We place a strong emphasis on **third-party collaboration**, robust research and testing protocols, and continuous improvement to remain aligned with the highest ethical, safety, and scientific standards.

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US EAR License Application Review Process can be found here:

- **https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/documents/regulation-docs/423-part-750-application-processing-issuance-and-or-denial/file**

Axon Ethics Statement and further policy resources can be found here:

- **Axon's Responsible Innovation Framework**
- **Ethics Equity & Advisory Council**
  Community Impact Team
- **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement**

Safety of TASER Devices
Our mission is to protect life and we prioritize the safety of our customers and the people they serve above all else. To that end, Axon conducts comprehensive, multi-phase testing on all TASER device models to ensure they meet all expectations for both safety and effectiveness. This includes cardiac, physiologic and metabolic, effectiveness, and probe wound profile testing, all of which is peer-reviewed and published. All pre-release safety and medical testing of TASER devices is overseen by Axon's Science and Medical Advisory Board, which is made up of independent medical experts in numerous fields from around the world.

TASER devices are the most studied use-of-force tool available today, with over 5 million field deployments and more than 1,135 studies, reports and resource papers, most of which are conducted by independent third parties. The evidence is clear: TASER devices reduce injuries to both officers and civilians. A DOJ-funded study by Wake Forest University found that less than 1% of TASER device uses result in injury, significantly fewer than other forms of force.

And, like all use of force tools, TASER devices are not risk free. Axon warns and provides training that TASER devices may pose a higher risk to certain populations such as those who are pregnant, infirm, elderly, or have a low body-mass index such as small children. Although any use of force technique presents risks to these same groups, these risks as well as best practices are core training objectives in Axon's training program.

For a complete overview of the studies associated with TASER devices, please visit our TASER safety page.

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Addressing Violations of Human Rights
Axon does not set the policies for the utilization of our products—this responsibility rests with the law enforcement agencies and governments that implement our technology. We firmly believe that constant education, development and learning are essential to ensuring responsible use. We are deeply committed to supporting law enforcement in every aspect of their training, because the more officers train, the more successful and responsible their utilization of TASER devices will be. We also offer education opportunities to local communities and human rights organizations, so that they can work together with their agencies and government officials on transparent/community inclusive new technology adoptions and building model policies that are specific to their community.

To that end, we have developed comprehensive virtual reality training resources that provide law enforcement with immersive, real-world scenarios to enhance their de-escalation skills and ensure safe, effective use of TASER devices. Our VR also includes Community Engagement Training (CET) scenarios to develop skills, empathy and de-escalation tactics and gain confidence in responding to calls with community members, victims in crisis, and individuals experiencing a mental health episode. See the Community Engagement VR Training page. We also have a dedicated, global training team that provides hands-on education and regularly hosts master instructor courses worldwide. These courses help officers understand not just how to use our products, but how to use them in a way that aligns with best practices and human rights standards.

While we do not set policies, we are always available to guide our customers as they build and refine their own. For those agencies looking for resources, we have made a guide for TASER Energy Weapon Policy Playbook available, which provides valuable insights into best practices for TASER use. We also collaborate with organizations such as Lexipol and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), who offer policy guidance to help agencies set the right standards for their personnel.

As a manufacturer, we do not stop at just providing products; we are continuously innovating to improve the utilization of our devices and ensure accountability. An example of this is the creation of **Signal Sidearm**, a sensor that automatically activates an officer's body camera when a firearm is drawn from its holster. This technology ensures that officers' cameras are activated during potentially critical incidents, allowing them to focus on their work while ensuring transparency and accountability. **Axon Signal** is also used in all modern TASER devices so that whenever a TASER device is armed, the TASER device activates all nearby Axon Body cameras using Axon Signal. This ensures that all nearby Axon body-worn cameras are activated and capturing evidence.

We remain committed to helping law enforcement agencies build stronger policies, provide the best training, and integrate cutting-edge technologies that not only enhance officer performance, but also ensure the responsible use of our products in service to the community.

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Suspending or Ceasing Product Sales
Axon adheres to the U.S. Department of State's determination of which countries are banned from receiving weapons such as TASER devices due to human rights and other violations. Shipment to all other countries is done on a case-by-case license approval by the Department of State. Additionally, it is important to note that we primarily sell to law enforcement. As such, any violations of human rights would surface through their agencies, which would be held accountable within their jurisdiction.

Drive Stun Mode
The "drive stun" mode was initially designed to provide law enforcement with a back-up tool to stop a threat in close quarters or where probe deployment was unsuccessful. However, after careful evaluation of its use and utility, we have removed this feature from our latest model, the TASER 10, which was launched in 2023. This decision reflects our commitment to enhancing the safety and effectiveness of our products, and prioritizing de-escalation and minimal force without causing undue harm. We continue to evolve our technology to minimize risk and maximize the potential for life-saving outcomes.

Our Commitment to the Future
At Axon, we believe that technology has the power to make the world a safer place. But it's not just about what we create—it's about how we create it. Our values-based framework for product design ensures that we are building the future of public safety with integrity, respect, and a deep commitment to human life. We are proud of the work we do, but we know there is more to be done. We remain steadfast in our pursuit of a world where violence no longer drives the story, and where technology allows us to protect life and promote justice without compromise.

Thank you again for your thoughtful inquiry. At Axon, we are always striving to improve, always learning, and always committed to protecting life. We look forward to working together to ensure that technology serves humanity's best interests and helps us move closer to a future free from violence.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Vice President, Legal
TASER Safety Officer

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS TO ONE PERSON, IT MATTERS TO US ALL.

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“I STILL CAN’T SLEEP AT NIGHT”

THE GLOBAL ABUSE OF ELECTRIC SHOCK EQUIPMENT

A wide variety of electric shock devices are specifically designed for and marketed to law enforcement. These range from electric shock stun guns, batons and shields, and body-worn electric shock devices which deliver electric shocks through direct contact with the body; to projectile electric shock weapons (PESWs) which can be fired from a distance. Despite the clear human rights risks associated with this equipment, there are no global regulations controlling what type of electric shock law enforcement equipment is permitted to be manufactured and used, or where equipment which can have a legitimate role in law enforcement can be traded. There is an urgent need for legally-binding, global regulations – a Torture-Free Trade Treaty - which prohibits the production of and trade in inherently cruel, inhuman and degrading devices, such as direct contact electric shock equipment, and strictly controls the trade in PESWs to law enforcement agencies to ensure they are not used in the commission of torture or other-ill-treatment.

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