

Chief Inspector
Conflict Management Development Unit
Operations Branch
PSNI Headquarters
65 Knock Road
Belfast
BT5 6KLE

11 April 2008

Dear Chief Inspector,

DRAFT EQIA – PSNI PROPOSALS TO INTRODUCE TASER

As you may be aware, the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) has made a number of representations to the PSNI over recent years regarding the proposed introduction of Tasers. In particular, CAJ has expressed concern about the potential impact Tasers may have on certain vulnerable groups in society such as children and young people, or pregnant women.

In order to address these concerns, CAJ has consistently argued for the need for a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the any decision around the proposed introduction of Tasers in order to identify how vulnerable groups might be adversely affected by the use of the new weapons and how such adverse consequences might be addressed. Such a process would in our view not only seek to achieve a more human rights compatible outcome for everyone, but would also contribute to increasing confidence in the PSNI generally, and also importantly, ensure compliance with the requirements of both the Northern Ireland Act and the Human Rights Act.

In this context, we would give a qualified welcome to the publication of this EQIA, however we would wish to register our concern at the fact that the EQIA has taken place *after* the decision to procure a number of Taser units has gone ahead and training in the use of the weapon has taken place. Regrettably, both in relation to the timing, and indeed content, this EQIA, rather than informing a course of future action, appears to provide more of an *ex post facto* justification for a decision that was in fact taken at least as far back as August 2007. Such

an approach in our view, not only undermines and misrepresents the purpose of an EQIA, but also has a detrimental effect on confidence in decision-making within the PSNI generally.

CAJ will not be making a lengthy response with regard to the content of this EQIA as we are aware of a substantive and robust document produced jointly by the Children's Law Centre (CLC) and Save the Children (SCF) which we would largely endorse. In particular, CAJ would reiterate concern about the lack of independent data contained in the draft EQIA. Equally, we are not convinced that the EQIA as currently formulated offers a realistic assessment of the potential adverse consequences that may arise from the use of the weapon. As such, we would recommend that the PSNI "go back to the drawing board" with respect to this EQIA and examine, in line with the legal requirements of an EQIA, a full range of data about the potential impacts of Tasers, in particular that outlined in the CLC/SCF submission. Such an approach would in our view lead to very different conclusions about the potential adverse consequences that might arise vis a vis the use of such a weapon in Northern Ireland. Such conclusions would in our view give rise to more serious consideration about the identification of specific mitigating and alternative measures that would need to be adopted should the decision to deploy Tasers proceed.

We hope that you find these comments useful.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Cunningham
Equality Project Worker