

Press Release

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Council of Europe anti-torture Committee calls for strict regulation of electrical discharge weapons

Strasbourg, 26.10.2010 – The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([CPT](#)) has called for the use of electrical discharge weapons (EDW) to be strictly regulated.

In its annual report, which was published today, the CPT states that it understands the wish of national authorities to provide law enforcement officials with means enabling them to give a more graduated response to dangerous situations. The Committee acknowledges that the possession of less lethal weapons such as EDW may in some cases make it possible to avoid the use of firearms. However, it stresses that these weapons can cause acute pain and are open to abuse.

"It is becoming increasingly common for police officers and other law enforcement officials to be issued with electrical discharge weapons, and these weapons are being used more and more during arrests. Authorities must ensure that their use is strictly regulated and that they are used only when this is really necessary", said Mauro Palma, President of the CPT.

In the Committee's view, the use of EDW should be limited to situations where there is a real and immediate threat to life or risk of serious injury. It is inadmissible to use them solely with the purpose of ensuring compliance with an order. Furthermore, their use should only be authorised when less coercive methods - such as negotiation and persuasion or manual control techniques - have failed or are impracticable and when it is the only alternative to other methods presenting greater risk of death or injury. The Committee also stresses the importance of adequately training public officials who may use EDW.

The Committee expresses strong reservations about the use of EDW in prison and closed psychiatric settings. Only very exceptional circumstances, such as a hostage-taking situation, might justify their use in these settings. The CPT also makes clear that it opposes the use of electric stun belts for controlling the movement of detained persons, whether inside or outside places of deprivation of liberty. Such equipment is inherently degrading for the person to whom it is applied, and the scope for misuse is particularly high.

The CPT states that before EDW are made available they should go through a technical authorisation procedure and that they should be equipped with memory chips which can record information on their use, enabling supervision by the competent authorities.

During the period covered by its 20th annual report - between August 2009 and July 2010 – the CPT made 20 visits to examine the conditions of detention in a broad range of institutions throughout Europe. During its periodic visits, the CPT is paying increased attention to social care facilities for the mentally and/or physically disabled, and the treatment of persons under aliens legislation. The CPT's ad hoc visits dealt with a variety of issues, ranging from isolation and surgical castration to alleged secret detention facilities.

[20th General Report on the CPT's Activities](#)

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