

Italy demands answers in death of man shot by Taser

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QUEBEC - The Italian ambassador to Canada criticized the Quebec government Friday for failing to provide explanations for the sudden death of an Italian immigrant almost a year ago.

Claudio Castagnetta, 32, died Sept. 20, 2007, while in custody of Quebec City police. He was reportedly shocked four times with a police Taser and jailed without receiving medical care.

"One year to find out what happened is not acceptable. You expect that possibly in some distressed, out-of-control African place - but not on this continent," Ambassador Gabriele Sardo said in an interview with Canwest News Service.

He said the handling of Castagnetta's death and other Taser-related incidents in the country conveys a negative image of Canada.

Twelve people have died in Canada since 2005 after police jolted them with electric stun guns.

"People will wake up to this reality, so before taking a trip to Canada you'd better be aware that you can be shot (with a Taser) under some conditions and these are not the ones one would reasonably expect across the ocean," Sardo said.

His comments come as the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is preparing to meet Aug 24 in Montreal where new research into stun gun safety will be presented.

The review was commissioned after a Polish man, Robert Dziekanski, died last October when he was shocked with a Taser by police at Vancouver airport.

The Italian government stepped up its pressure for answers about Castagnetta's death in the light of Dziekanski's death. Last December, the Italian Foreign Ministry took the unusual step of summoning the Canadian ambassador to Italy to complain about the pace of the investigation and request more information.

Castagnetta was arrested last Sept. 18 outside a convenience store in Quebec City for public disorder. He was walking barefoot in the store and refused to leave the premises. Eyewitnesses recounted he looked confused and disoriented.

The police said Castagnetta resisted arrest by stiffening his body and they had to use a stun gun.

He was taken into custody and the next day, during his transportation back to the jail from the courthouse, he was seen banging his head several times. He was not taken to the hospital and a day later died from what a preliminary coroner's report called self-inflicted wounds to the head.

Castagnetta's family and friends are upset he was not taken to the hospital even though he went into convulsions while in jail and showed signs of psychological disorder.

In a letter sent to Italian-Canadian MP Joe Volpe, Castagnetta's father asked him to put more pressure on Canadian authorities.

"It would appear that there is a desire to simply shelve the results of this inquiry and never share information with my family," Corrado Castagnetta wrote earlier this month. His letter was published by the Canadian Italian daily, *Corriere Canadese*.

The Italian ambassador lamented that despite numerous interventions from his country's authorities no information surrounding Castagnetta's death has been released.

"It's very, very disappointing, to say the least," Sardo said. "And it's something that inevitably would make you lose trust in the work of authorities."

The provincial police have completed their investigation and handed in the report to the public security ministry. A spokeswoman for Quebec's chief Crown prosecutor said a decision on whether charges could be laid against police or prison guards will be made "in the next few weeks."

The Italian ambassador expressed his frustration in a letter sent this week to Quebec Premier Jean Charest. Sardo also said Italian officials boycotted the events related to the 400th anniversary of Quebec City this summer to send a "strong message" to the government.

A spokesman for the premier said a reply to the ambassador's letter is expected.