



THE DEATH OF ROBERT DZIEKANSKI » 'THE PUBLIC DESERVES ANSWERS'

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2007

## 'Vacuum' sparks B.C. taser inquiry

» Attorney-General launches full-scale probe into airport incident » Premier extends apology to Polish man's grieving mother

BY PATRICK BRETHOUR VANCOUVER  
AND JUSTINE HUNTER VICTORIA

British Columbia is launching a full-scale inquiry into the death of Robert Dziekanski at the hands of the RCMP, saying the authorities have failed to tell the public how a 40-year-old Polish man emigrating to live with his mother instead ended up dead on the floor of Vancouver's airport.

Attorney-General Wally Oppal said the government was forced to call a public inquiry after it became clear various authorities - including Vancouver airport, the RCMP and Canada Border Services Agency - were not providing useful answers about what went wrong. "There was a huge vacuum of information there," Mr. Oppal said. "We all viewed that horrible video, and the circum-

stances, and I think it's safe to say we were waiting for some kind of appropriate answer from the authorities and nothing was forthcoming at all. ... The public deserves answers."

Mr. Dziekanski died within minutes of being tasered repeatedly at Vancouver International Airport a month ago, where he had spent hours wandering in a vain search for his mother, Zofia Cisowski.

They never found each other. Four officers, responding to a report of a man with erratic behaviour destroying property, entered the arrivals area on the morning of Oct. 14, and tasered Mr. Dziekanski less than 30 seconds later. A digital video of the encounter flashed around the world last week, with the disturbing 10 minutes of footage showing Mr. Dziekanski screaming and writhing

before being pinned down and handcuffed, and then lapsing into unconsciousness.

Premier Gordon Campbell did not directly criticize the RCMP or others yesterday, but offered Mr. Dziekanski's grieving mother a public apology. "I'm glad to apologize for what took place," the Premier said, promising to phone Ms. Cisowski by tomorrow. » SEE 'INQUIRY' PAGE A7

### Faith and policing

The Dziekanski case is but one of many problems the new RCMP commissioner must fix. EDITORIAL, PAGE A24 »

### It's called 'sousveillance'

The digital revolution has made eyewitnesses of us all. MARGARET WENTE, PAGE A25 »

FROM PAGE A1 » INQUIRY

## Use of tasers should be reconsidered, B.C. Attorney-General says

» "This is a human tragedy. My heart goes out to his mother, to his family, to his friends," Mr. Campbell said.

It's not something anyone in British Columbia, frankly, ever would have anticipated happening."

The province has yet to define the terms of the inquiry, but in a statement released yesterday, said that the review will be examining taser use immediately.

The inquiry will also examine the circumstances of Mr.

Dziekanski's death and how Vancouver airport deals with foreign passengers, although those portions may be delayed in deference to an ongoing homicide investigation.

The RCMP declined to comment on Mr. Oppal's criticism, while the CBSA could not be reached for immediate comment.

Paul Levy, the airport's operations vice-president, said the airport authority has been sharing all the information it has with the public.

The tape of Mr. Dziekanski's

death has created a furor both in Poland and Canada, with the RCMP reporting over the weekend that several of its officers in the Lower Mainland have been accosted by members of the public, including one incident in which a police cruiser was pelted with eggs. Mr. Campbell said he understands public frustration, but urged British Columbians to remember that the police put themselves in harm's way every day. "It's a very difficult job."

Solicitor-General John Les,

who last week refused to launch any additional inquiries, said yesterday the public inquiry is the best way to answer the public's questions, but initially stopped short of offering an apology, saying he wanted to find out more details first.

After the Premier apologized, Mr. Les offered his own condolences.

NDP public safety critic Mike Farnworth said Mr. Les's slowness to apologize is more evidence that the Solicitor-General should re-

sign, after fumbling the issues of gang violence and Mr. Dziekanski's death. Mr. Campbell rejected that call, and criticized the opposition for injecting politics into the debate over the Polish man's death.

Mr. Les, along with Mr. Campbell, continued to reject calls for a moratorium on taser use.

"If there were to be an immediate moratorium that would have implications in terms of the safety of the public, safety of police officers, and other issues like that.

While there won't be a moratorium, we are certainly going to look at whether the guidelines are appropriate and whether they are adhered to.

However, Mr. Oppal said he thinks the use of tasers should be reconsidered. "When the taser was first introduced, we were told it would be good because it would give police some avenue of response short of lethal force. ... But when you get the number of deaths that have taken place, you have to be flexible enough to take a second look."