

**PRESS STATEMENT BY THE COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE ON THE
SHOOTING OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS BY POLICEMEN AT DANSOMAN, ACCRA ON
FRIDAY, 21ST APRIL 2006**

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) notes with deep concern yet another regrettable incidence of operational misjudgement by the police leading to the deaths of innocent civilians.

On Friday, 21st April, 2006 news reports on some radio stations in Accra stated that four persons, including two women, had been shot dead by a patrol team of policemen from the Dansoman District Police Station in pursuit of a group of suspected armed robbers, fleeing in a Daewoo Tico taxi cab with registration number GR 2995 X. The four however were innocent civilians who were allegedly mistaken for armed robbers who had earlier snatched a bag from one of the deceased women around Zodiac in Dansoman, a suburb of Accra.

In a press statement issued by the Police Public Affairs Directorate on Friday, the Police gave an account of two incidents of pursuing armed robbers in Dansoman in the early hours of Friday. In the first incident, the Police stated that they had exchanged fire with a group of suspected armed robbers who had stolen an Opel Astra taxi cab with registration number GR 9012 W, wounding one of them who was arrested. The suspect, one Sumaila sustained gunshot wounds and is receiving treatment at a Hospital in Accra. In the second incident the Police stated that a patrol team had sighted a Daewoo Tico taxi cab suspected to be used in armed robbery. The police patrol team had allegedly come under fire from the occupants of the taxi, however two of the suspects carrying weapons escaped. The police who returned fire killed the four remaining persons in the taxi, who turned out to be innocent civilians. The Police issued a second statement on Friday confirming that they had killed innocent persons in pursuit of the suspected armed robbers.

This unfortunate incident has again brought to the fore the need for the police to be more circumspect in exercising its professional judgment in pursuing suspects of crime. The CHRI is mindful of the fact that the spate of armed robberies countrywide has been a disturbing phenomenon for both the public and the police. Consequently the CHRI states that in a bid to deal decisively and efficiently with armed robbery, the protection of basic fundamental human rights including the right to life, liberty and property must not be sacrificed unduly by any person including the police.

Given the enormous powers of the police to pursue and arrest crime suspects the CHRI wishes to emphasise the centrality of the respect for basic human rights in the exercise of police powers. In exercising their professional judgement particularly in instances where force has to be used, the CHRI calls on the police to abide strictly by the principles of reasonability in the use of force. As in the instant case, where it is shown that the person being pursued had not attacked the police the use of such excessive force leading to fatalities cannot be justified.

Consequently the CHRI calls for an immediate full scale independent and impartial investigation into the circumstances leading to the death of these innocent persons and sanction the offending police officers. The CHRI also calls on the police to make known to the public, the results of their investigations. The CHRI also calls upon the State as the employer of the police, to compensate the bereaved families for their loss.

In ensuring that the police perform their functions efficiently, the CHRI calls for the immediate drawing up of guidelines on the use of force by the Police to make this aspect of policing in Ghana conform to the Constitution and international standards on the use of force and the protection of human rights in the exercise of police powers. The CHRI calls on the Police Council, which has primary oversight responsibility for the Police to ensure that these guidelines are drawn up and implemented as soon as possible.

The CHRI extends its heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims of this unfortunate incident.

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