

Hundreds rally in Miami Beach over police killing of teenager

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On Saturday around 400 friends, supporters, and relatives of Israel Hernández-Llach rallied at the site where the teenager was tased to death by Miami Beach police last week. Family members have called for an independent investigation into the killing, but have only been offered empty reassurances by the police department.

Hernández, a well-known artist in the area, was pursued on foot by five police officers after he was caught spray-painting on a vacant McDonald's building August 6. After cornering the 150- pound teenager, one of the officers, Jorge Mercado, who has since been placed on paid administrative leave, fired a taser into the youth's chest, killing him.

Those participating in the rally on Saturday booed and hissed at police officers standing nearby while holding signs reading "Justice for Israel Hernández." The victim's father, Israel Hernández Bandera, told reporters that the killing of his son was an "act of barbarism" and an "assassination of a young artist and photographer."

Many of those present knew Hernández through his artwork. Some of his work has been shown in Miami art galleries and the youth was recently recognized by US Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

In response to the family's demands for an independent investigation into the killing of Hernández the Miami Beach Police Department announced Friday that the Florida Department of Law Enforcement has agreed to review the investigation made by the local police department. However, this means that the investigation will still be performed internally.

Raymond Martinez, chief of the Miami Beach police, has sought to justify the actions of Mercado by claiming that Hernández was running toward the five officers after he was cornered. However, the fact that

the youth was only 5 feet, 6 inches in height and only weighed about 150 pounds makes this explanation extremely dubious. So far no other witnesses, besides the officers themselves, have come forward to corroborate the department's version of events.

While the Miami Beach Police Department Taser Policy states that the supposedly nonlethal weapon may be used by officers when they feel an "imminent threat of physical force," there is no mention of the dangers of firing this weapon into a person's chest. The only areas of the body officers are forbidden to fire the weapon into are the eyes, groin and face.

Dr. Douglas P. Zipes, a leading authority in electrophysiology, in an article published May 21, 2012 in *Circulation*, the journal of the American Heart Association, concluded that when fired into the chest Electronic Control Devices (ECD) can provoke cardiac arrest resulting from ventricular fibrillation (VF). Without immediate resuscitation in these cases, according to Zipes, asystole, a state of no cardiac activity leading to death, occurs.

After providing several examples of deaths resulting from chest shots, Zipes wrote, "It is clear from the information cited above that an ECD shock to the chest can produce cardiac electrical capture at rapid rates in animals and humans. Furthermore, it is clear that VF has been documented as early as two minutes after an ECD shock in humans."

Also included in Zipes' report is the fact that after the deployment of tasers among police departments in the United States the rate of in-custody deaths increased by 600 percent.

TASER International, Inc. has published a Warnings, Risks, Release, and Indemnification Agreement that acknowledges the danger of firing the weapon into a person's chest, but makes no serious condemnation of

this practice.

The document includes the line: “When possible, avoid targeting the frontal chest area near the heart to reduce the risk of potential serious injury or death.” It also states that cardiac capture may be more likely in thin adults like Israel Hernández.

Despite all of this readily available information, Sergeant Robert Hernandez, a Miami Beach police spokesman, stated Friday that “you don’t die of a taser.” He suggested that the young man “could have died from physical exertion or a pre-existing condition, or something in his system.”

The official cause of death has yet to be established due to pending toxicology reports, which could take some time to be returned.



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