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## **DAMNING REPORT ON THE DEATH OF CHRISTOPHER ALDER FALLS SHORT OF FAMILY'S DEMAND FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY**

The IPCC today delivered its report into the death in police custody of Christopher Alder to Parliament. While welcoming the criticisms levelled at four of the five officers immediately involved in the events surrounding his death and who subsequently refused to co-operate with the IPCC Review, INQUEST and Christopher's family are disappointed that both the IPCC and the Home Secretary Charles Clarke have resisted their call for a public inquiry into his death.

INQUEST has long highlighted the disproportionate number of deaths of young black men in police custody in circumstances involving medical neglect or the use of force. The IPCC Review recognises that racism played a part in Christopher's death, and as the Chair of the IPCC Nick Hardwick commented "...I do believe the fact he was black stacked the odds more heavily against him," and also that "...the officers' neglect undoubtedly did deny him the chance of life". His conclusion that the officers' failure to actively assist Christopher meant that he "did not matter enough for them to do all they could to save him" is a damning indictment in itself of their conduct and Nick Hardwick specifically considers the officers to be "guilty of the most serious neglect of duty".

Despite two police investigations, an inquest, a criminal trial, an internal police disciplinary hearing and the review itself, Christopher's family feel that they are still no closer to obtaining justice for his death. Speaking at a press conference after the report's publication, Christopher's sister Janet said:

*The serious failings the report shows highlights the pressing need for further investigation and a public inquiry which could summon all those involved and through that I believe more evidence could be gained.*

Deborah Coles, Co-director of INQUEST, said:

*The public scandal of this shocking case is that the police officers who owed a duty of care to Christopher Alder have never publicly accounted for their actions on that night. Public confidence in the police will only be regained when the rule of law is seen to apply equally to those in uniform.*

The full text of the report is available from the Home Office website at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) .

## Background:

Christopher Alder, a 37 year old black man who was a former paratrooper decorated for service in Northern Ireland, died on 1 April 1998 after being arrested and taken to Queen's Gardens Police Station, Hull. He was arrested at Hull Royal Infirmary where he had been taken after a fight outside a nightclub. He was taken in a police van to the station. He was supported into the custody suite and after 13 minutes police officers called an ambulance. However despite resuscitation attempts Mr Alder died.

INQUEST has been working with Christopher's sister Janet Alder and her lawyers since shortly after his death. Following seven weeks of evidence the jury at the inquest held in 2000 into his death returned a verdict of unlawful killing and said that the death was due to 'positional asphyxia'.

From video evidence shown to the jury it was demonstrated that he died after being left unconscious face down on the floor of Queen's Gardens Police Station Custody Suite for 11 minutes. His trousers were around his knees, he had been doubly incontinent and blood formed a pool around his mouth. Apart from removing the handcuffs when he was initially brought into the police station the four police officers present in the custody suite did not touch Mr Alder in the 11 minutes he lay dying on the floor despite his condition. Rattles of his breath were also clearly heard on the video.

The jury heard that Mr Alder had been involved in an altercation outside The Waterfront nightclub during which he had been hit in the mouth and had fallen to the floor. He was taken to Hull Royal Infirmary where he was seen by a doctor. Mr Alder was confused and uncooperative at the hospital and was unable to be treated. Police officers dragged him from the premises. Both inside the hospital and outside the police drew a CS Spray canister and threatened to use it on him. Once outside Mr Alder complained that he wanted to return to see the doctors. According to police officers he was still being abusive and they warned him that if he did not leave he would be arrested. He refused to leave and was arrested for breach of the peace and handcuffed behind his back. Mr Alder was then put into the back of a police van and conveyed to the police station.

On arrival at the police station evidence was heard that he was found motionless in the police van. The video then showed him being dragged into the police station custody suite and placed face down on the floor. Officers were heard to speculate that he was faking illness.

Failure after failure occurred in the police investigation held under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority. The death was never treated as potential homicide and the custody suite never sealed and preserved as a scene of crime. Crucial blood staining was wiped from the custody area and van. No proper enquiry was ever made as to why Christopher's trousers were around his knees with mud on them and on his thighs. The clothes of the police officers who had been involved with him were not the subject of any examination report and sent for dry cleaning. The clothes, and tooth, of Christopher Alder himself were destroyed.

Five police officers were suspended from duty and after the inquest there was a subsequent trial for manslaughter. Having listened to submissions at the end of the Prosecution case, the Judge at Teesside directed on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2002 that the police officers could not safely be convicted on the evidence on either count that they faced, and the Jury must therefore enter not guilty verdicts. As a consequence the officers have never answered any questions about the incident, exercising their right not to incriminate themselves under the Coroners Rules at the inquest and because of the failure of the prosecution.

Christopher Alder's called on the then Home Secretary David Blunkett in April 2004 to hold a public inquiry into his death. Following the BBC1 Rough Justice programme *Death on Camera* screened in April 2004, which contained the video evidence of Christopher's death on the floor of the custody suite in Queen's Gardens Police Station, David Blunkett asked the Independent Police Complaints Commission to review lessons to be learnt from the death. The IPCC delivered its review to parliament on 27 March 2006.

The need for this Inquiry is all the more pressing following the successful civil case against Humberside Police which concluded on Friday 27th January 2006, when Jason Paul, arrested on suspicion of the murder of the Christopher Alder, and subsequently charged with causing grievous bodily harm with intent upon him, was

awarded damages against the police. His jury found that his arrest and charge arose because Humberside Police Officers wanted to deflect potential criticism away from the police, over the death.

**Notes to editors:**

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroner's courts.

Further Information	<a href="http://www.inquest.org.uk">www.inquest.org.uk</a>
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