

MEDIA STATEMENT

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Findings of the Coordinated Review of the management of the LynnMall supermarket attacker released

An independent review report has found significant deficiencies in aspects of the management of the person responsible for the 3 September 2021 terror attack at the LynnMall Countdown supermarket.

The review was conducted by the Independent Police Conduct Authority, the Office of the Inspectorate for the Department of Corrections and the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security.

This report is unavoidably focused on the person responsible for committing the attack, but we also acknowledge the devastating and profound impact of that attack on the survivors, witnesses, whānau and emergency responders.

Ahamed Aathil Mohamed Samsudeen committed the attack, and died on 3 September 2021 after he was shot by Police. The Independent Police Conduct Authority has investigated and published a report on the fatal Police shooting of Mr Samsudeen separately from the Coordinated Review.

The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, Police and Corrections all dealt with Mr Samsudeen at various times after his concerning online activity came to the attention of the NZSIS in September 2015 and Police in March 2016. Mr Samsudeen had researched travelling to Turkey (a known gateway to Syria and ISIL),¹ and had posted comments supporting violent extremism and ISIL terrorist attacks overseas.

Mr Samsudeen was arrested for possession of violent objectionable material in May 2017 (as he was about to leave New Zealand), and again in August 2018 for possession of an offensive weapon. He was remanded in custody from that point until July 2021.

Mr Samsudeen had stated his intention to commit a domestic terror attack on multiple occasions, particularly if he was prevented from leaving New Zealand to support ISIL. The Coordinated Review has found that Mr Samsudeen presented as a real threat to New Zealand's security and was justifiably under surveillance.

The Coordinated Review also found that, while the relevant agencies and individuals were generally doing their best to work together and manage the risk Mr Samsudeen posed, he was very challenging for them to deal with and there were four related areas where the response fell short.

Missed opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration

There were missed opportunities for Mr Samsudeen to be supported and directed away from violent extremism from 2016 when he came to the attention of Police and during his first period in custody

¹ Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (also sometimes referred to as ISIS or Daesh/Daish/Da'ish/Da'eesh).

(from May 2017 to June 2018). Equally, there were inadequate, fragmented and ad hoc plans for his releases from prison in both 2018 and 2021.

Inadequate inter-agency arrangements

The inter-agency arrangements that exist as part of the National Security System did not always work well. In the absence of an appropriate lead agency, preventive measures for countering violent extremism were ad hoc, Police-initiated and Police-run. There was no long-term plan involving social agencies and the community, that would have been required to address Mr Samsudeen's needs and begin the process of disengaging him from violent extremist behaviour.

Insufficient information sharing

In some instances, there was reluctance by Police and Corrections to share all relevant information with frontline staff and the community who were dealing with him on release. Programmes to counter violent extremism depend upon community support and must be undertaken as a partnership between government agencies and relevant community groups. There must therefore be a greater willingness to trust those groups with the information they need to participate effectively.

Unduly lengthy period on remand in custody

In total, Mr Samsudeen spent more than four years on remand in custody for two separate sets of offences between 2017 and his eventual release on bail in 2021. This was primarily caused by delays resulting from the legislative process of determining whether his online postings were objectionable, and the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown on the operation of the courts. This was an unduly lengthy remand period, which magnified Mr Samsudeen's sense of grievance against the system, and greatly increased his alienation and radicalisation. We cannot say whether his attack would have occurred anyway, but his period in custody without the appropriate and necessary interventions and support enhanced the risk that he would.

"These are significant findings that have implications for the wider government system. It is beyond the remit of this review to suggest what the solutions to these issues may be, but we hope that all relevant agencies will consider them as lessons to be learned from this tragic event" said Judge Doherty, the Chair of the IPCA.

Media Enquiries: Warren Young, 021 557 783