

Nation & World Report

Should Norway police be armed?

RAMPAGE DEATH TOLL
DROPS TO 76

Violent crime rate
steadily inching up

BY MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ
The New York Times

OSLO, Norway — When a

man dressed in a police uni-

form began slaughtering

young people at a Norwe-

gian summer camp last

week, one of the first to be

killed was a real police offi-

cer named Trond Berntsen,

who for years had worked in

security at the camp.

Whether Berntsen tried to

stop the gunman is still being

debated. But facing a man

carrying multiple guns and

ample ammunition, there

was little he could do. Like

most other police officers

here, he had no weapon.

By law, Norwegian police

officers must have authoriza-

tion from their chief to gain

access to a firearm, but they

have rarely needed to ask,

until recently. Violent crime

has been steadily increasing,

joining a society used to leav-

ing doors unlocked and chil-

dren to play without fear.

Coupled with growing criti-

cism over the police's slow

response time to the attacks

and confusion about the

death toll, which was low-

ered Monday to 76 from 93,

there are growing questions

about whether the police are

equipped to deal with the

challenges.

"Criminals are now carry-

ing weapons, so some people

now think that police officers

should have weapons as

well," said Gry Jorum Hol-

men, a spokeswoman for the

Norwegian police union.

It took police SWAT units

more than an hour to reach

the camp, on Utøya Island,

after reports of the shooting

came in. Officers had to drive

to the shore across from the

site of the shooting attack

and use boats to get to the is-

land. A police helicopter was

unable to get off the ground,

A vigil to honor the victims of last week's attack in Norway will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Nordic Heritage Museum, 3014 N.W. 67th St., Seattle. There will be a moment of silence and offering of prayers for the victims. On Friday, an ecumenical prayer service will be held at St. James Cathedral, Ninth Avenue and Marion Street in Seattle. The service begins at 6:30 p.m.

Seattle Times staff

He'd hoped that the first hearing into last week's twin attacks, which he had suggested in an online manifesto would be "marketing" for his beliefs, would be televised live by the world's media. He wanted to dress in a uniform to defend his actions as part of a bid to trigger an anti-Islamic revolution in Europe.

The Norwegian judge, however, ruled the proceedings should be held behind closed doors. Breivik was formally charged with violating Norway's anti-terrorism laws and remanded to solitary confinement for the next four weeks.

Norway is one of only three Western European countries lacking a fully armed police force. Most police officers in Britain and Iceland do not carry firearms

with them. "I would prefer to live in a society where police normal-

frequency of rape and other assault has inched ever higher, statistics show. Murder rates, however, have remained stable.

The increasing presence of foreign criminal networks active in Norway is part of the reason for higher crime rates, Holmen and others said, though domestic criminal groups have also become

more brazen. While Norwegian crime rates still look insignificant compared with a country like the U.S., the uptick in violence, however small, has unsettled many here.

Now only beat police officers in patrol cars have immediate access to weapons. By law, however, they have to remain unloaded and locked in a box in the car unless authorization is given.

Some experts worry that arming police officers would only lead to an escalation of violence as criminals arm themselves in response. For many, though, resistance to the idea has more to do with national pride.

"I would prefer to live in a society where police normal-

ly work unarmed," said Johan Knutsson, a professor at the Norwegian Police Uni-

Anders Behring Breivik, left, the suspect in the bombing and shooting rampage in his native Norway, leaves an Oslo courthouse in a police car Monday.

JON-ARE BERG-JACOBSEN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

