

Laotians question police over shooting

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SANTA ANA — Although police investigators concluded that the fatal shooting of a 52-year-old Laotian refugee in August was justified, the city's Laotian community has remained puzzled by the incident.

The lack of understanding surfaced Tuesday night during a meeting of the city's Human Relations Committee in which Laotians specifically were invited to question police about the use of deadly force in the case of Linthong Panyanak.

Panyanak was shot four times by Santa Ana police officer Jim Bland on Aug. 17. He was armed with a butcher knife and was shot after he allegedly refused to stop advancing toward Bland in a confrontation in the 1100 block of South Minnie Street.

Tuesday night, police Sgt. Bob Ensley explained to an audience of about 75 people — mostly Laotians from the Hmong ethnic group — that the officer had followed all de-

partment policies in shooting Panyanak.

Nevertheless, Ensley was asked why Bland did not use his night stick or tear gas instead of his revolver to subdue the knife-wielding suspect.

Speaking through translator Cheu Thao, Ensley said the use of the night stick would have allowed Panyanak "to get close enough to the officer to do great bodily harm."

"We have been told many times that American police officers are not to shoot except to protect somebody," said one elderly Laotian man. "Why was not tear gas used instead?"

Tear gas is only about 90 percent effective, Ensley said, and does not guarantee to stop an assault suspect.

Another person in the audience said he was puzzled as to why Panyanak was shot four times.

"The basic reason was that he didn't stop coming at the officer," Ensley said. "The officer fired two rounds and he didn't stop; then he fired two more."