

## Campaign Leaflet

### Up to 80% of women in prison have diagnosable mental health problems **National Campaign Launched for Radical Change**

Women's organizations, mental health agencies and prison reform groups today launch a National Campaign to highlight the scandal over the locking up of women with mental health problems. The campaign will be launched on **Tuesday the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2007 at 2.30pm in Committee Room 19, House of Commons, Westminster, London.** The Campaign will urge the government to take urgent action to stop women with mental health problems being sent to prison and to invest in mental health provision, drug treatment and support and supervision in the community. There are 4,300 women in prison in England and Wales spread across 17 women's jails. The women's prison population has increased rapidly in the last decade, from 2,600 when Labour came to power in 1997, despite no equivalent increase in the nature or seriousness of their offending. The effects on 18,000 children every year whose mothers are sent to prison are so often nothing short of catastrophic.

At the meeting, Baroness Jean Corston, Author of the Report of the Home Office '**Review of Vulnerabilities of Women in the Criminal Justice System**' will highlight the need for a radical change in the way we treat women throughout the whole Criminal Justice System. Baroness Corston's report, which was triggered by the deaths of six women in Styal prison, recommends shutting existing women's prisons and replacing them with small units in a radical 10 year reform programme (See enclosed Executive Summary of the Corston Report). She calls for a new approach, treating women both holistically and individually – a woman-centred approach. Other speakers include Lorely Burt MP for Solihull and Juliet Lyon the Director of the Prison Reform Trust.

Juliet Lyon, Director of the Prison Reform Trust stated "*So many women in prison are mentally ill, so much of their offending is a public health, rather than a criminal justice, concern, this long standing problem could be solved, not by investing in more women's prisons, but by providing mental health care, drug treatment, court diversion and women's support and supervision centres across the country. Prison is a punishment of last resort. It is cruel to lock up mentally ill women and it does lasting harm to them and their families*".

Lorely Burt, MP for Solihull commented, '*You could not devise a system more calculated to make a woman with mental illness worse than to lock her up in prison. There must be adequate facilities for assessment and treatment without a mentally ill person ever having to suffer the totally inappropriate and damaging conditions of a prison. Our prisons should be reserved for those who deserve to be there.*'

Krishna Maharaj the Director of City and Hackney Mind whose organization undertakes advocacy work with male and female offenders at the Centre for Forensic Medicine, a secure unit in Hackney stated, '*It is only a few years since the UK stopped shackling women prisoners*

*to their beds during childbirth, a practice that shocked the world. The way we treat women in prison who are mentally ill is incompatible with human dignity and constitutes a serious obstacle to rehabilitation and recovery. If a lot of women in prison have mental health problems, it begs the question should they be in prison. Women have been marginalized within a system largely designed by men, for men. The inhumane way the UK treats vulnerable women is incompatible with international human rights standards and may be in breach of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)'.*

### **The Scandal of Women in Prison in the UK – the facts (See Notes for references)**

- Up to 80% of women in prison have diagnosable mental health problems.
- The majority of women prisoners are serving short sentences for non-violent crimes such as theft and handling stolen goods.
- 50% of women in prison have at least one personality disorder and a high rate of severe mental illness such as schizophrenia or delusional disorders
- More than 50% of women in prison report having experienced domestic violence, physical, emotional or sexual abuse and 40% say they have attempted suicide at some time in their life.
- Many women in prison can be described as victims as well as offenders.
- Proportionately more women than men are remanded in custody.
- Relationship problems feature strongly in women's pathways into crime including coercion by men.
- Around 55% of women in prison have a child under 16, 33% a child under 5 and 20% are lone parents.

### **Notes**

1. The following organizations are involved in organizing this meeting: Prison Reform Trust, SmartJustice, Mental health Unit of NACRO, Asian Women's Advisory Service, The Bromley trust, Peter Bedford Housing Association, Mind, Hospital and Prison Action Network, Together FMHP Service, Greater London Domestic Violence Project.
2. References:
  - Working with Women Prisoners, HM Prison Service, November 2003
  - London's prisons mental health services: A Review, March 2006 Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health and CSIP's London Development Centre, by Graham Durcan and Karen Knowles.
  - The Prison Reform Trust report 'Troubled Inside: Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Women in Prison', published in July 2003
  - Influence of environmental factors on mental health within prisons: focus group study, Jo Nurse, Paul Woodcock, and Jim Ormsby, BMJ 2003 327: 480.
  - Strategy and Resource Guide for the Resettlement of Women Prisoners, HM Prison Service, Spring 2006
  - Training in prisons must be 'appropriate' for female offenders – Talisman, Issue 55, October 2006

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