



## Quaker United Nations Office

13 Avenue du Mervelet  
CH-1209 Geneva, Switzerland

Tel +41 (22) 748-4804  
Fax +41 (22) 748-4819  
Email rbrett@quno.ch

UN Commission on Human Rights  
61<sup>st</sup> session (14 March-22 April 2005)  
Item 12

### Oral Statement by Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers)

Delivered by Megan Bastick, Quaker UN Office, Geneva, on Wednesday 6 April 2005

#### Women in Prison

Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) welcomes the increasing attention being given by the UN Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission to the issue of imprisoned women.

Whilst women are a minority of the world prison population, in many countries the rate of women's imprisonment is increasing *far faster* than the rate of men's imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> Women prisoners tend to be overlooked in prison systems designed primarily for men, and face a range of difficulties that are *specific to* women prisoners, or which affect women prisoners *in a particularly harsh way*.

We welcome the fact that the Special Procedures, in undertaking country visits and in their other work, are becoming more aware of the particular problems faced by women prisoners.<sup>2</sup> We encourage them to give further attention to this area, in particular to analyse:

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, the HEUNI *Report on the Sixth United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and Criminal Justice Systems*, analysing data from 32 mostly European States and Territories, showed an increase in number of convicted females in the prison population from 4.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1995, to 5.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1997. In Australia, New Zealand, the United States and England and Wales, the female prison population has, since 1995, increased faster than the male prison population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004) *Australian Social Trends*). In Australia, between 1984 and 2003, there was a 75% increase in the imprisonment rate per 100,000 male adults for men, whereas the equivalent rate for women soared by 209% (Australian Institute of Criminology, at <http://www.aic.gov.au/topics/women/stats/corrections.html>, accessed 29 March 2005).

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's mission to Belarus (E/CN.4/2005/6/Add.3), and certain of its Communications (E/CN.4/2005/6) and Opinions (E/CN.4/2005/6/Add.1); the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health's summary of cases transmitted to Governments and replies received (E/CN.4/2005/51/Add.1); the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of human rights in Myanmar (E/CN.4/2005/36); the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living's study on women and adequate housing (E/CN.4/2005/43); the Report of Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Burundi (E/CN.4/2005/118); Annual report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children (E/CN.4/2005/71).

- why so many women are held in pre-trial detention and are imprisoned for minor, non-violent offences; and to examine the connections between women's poverty and their increasing imprisonment;
- discrimination in the treatment of women prisoners, including as regards healthcare, educational opportunities, and the fact that women are usually imprisoned much further from their homes than are men, making it difficult for women prisoners to maintain contact with their families;
- the particular difficulties for women in prison who are indigenous or foreign nationals, and to study why, in some countries, such women are vastly overrepresented in the prison population;
- the situation of female offenders under the age of 18, with a view to ensuring that there is no discrimination between males and females in the age of adulthood for criminal purposes, and that juvenile female offenders are separated from adult prisoners and juvenile male prisoners;
- the particular impact that imprisonment of mothers has upon their families, and the larger social costs of the increasing imprisonment of women; and
- alternatives to imprisonment for women, particularly mothers, such as suspended sentences, community orders and probation, as well as alternatives to pre-trial detention.

-----