

Friends World Committee for Consultation - Quakers

*Statement to the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
14th Session Vienna, May 2005*

Standards and Norms – Women in Prison

Recalling paragraph 30 of the Bangkok Declaration, FWCC welcomes the suggestion that the Commission review the adequacy of Standards and Norms in relation to prison management and prisoners. We support the idea of a Charter of Prisoners' Rights. Recalling also the Vienna Declaration Action Plan's reference to women in the criminal justice system, we wish to focus attention on women prisoners, who represent a small but rapidly growing minority of prison populations. Standards and Norms relating to the treatment of prisoners were established on the basis of the male population and do not adequately cover the particular ways that imprisonment affects women. The Quaker UN Office in Geneva has published Preliminary Research on Women Prisoners¹, which identifies some of the most urgent issues, including the separation of women from their families, their vulnerability, their physical and mental health, and problems of reintegration. We urge States to recognise and address the particular problems that imprisonment imposes on women (and their children). The offences that women commit tend to be less grave, and therefore we encourage States to promote alternatives to prison for women, especially pre-trial. We ask the Commission to consider the need to review Standards and Norms with regard to women prisoners.

Quakers also wish to draw the attention of Delegates to the impact of maternal imprisonment on children, in particular the babies and young children who are imprisoned with their mothers. Appropriate guidance should be developed about decision-making in relation to separating babies and young children from their mother or imprisoning them with her. Appropriate and adequate provision must be made for children who do go into prison. Their experience may increase the risk of their becoming offenders themselves, linking this issue to the Riyadh Guidelines. Yet, there are no international standards and little consistency in relation to children imprisoned with their mothers. Quakers have published draft suggested guidelines for the treatment of these children.² We hope that the Commission will consider the need to develop such guidelines and will find the preparatory work we have done helpful.

¹ Available from www.quno.org

² Available from www.quno.org in French, Spanish and English