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Prisoners are forgotten humans of the Penal Colony

“The three day public hearing of the National Consultation on Human Rights, ending in Canberra today, ignored prisoners in its program. Prisoners exist in a slave-like relationship where our lives are entirely susceptible to government whim yet this isn’t seen as a human rights problem” said JA spokesperson Brett Collins.

“Australia with its recent history as a penal colony has a special obligation to reconcile the power of the state with respect for the citizen, where state policy itself is responsible for human rights abuses in total isolation. In a democracy, the prisoner’s position is unique” said JA Coordinator Michael Poynder.

“Recent attacks on our democratic status as voting citizens unworthy to be heard and be informed, or sold to multinationals as embarrassing slaves in privatised prisons, or described by the responsible Commissioner as “scumbags” to be arbitrarily locked in solitary confinement, or to be hounded without refuge upon our release; all show how serious the defence of the unpopular is for our society” said Mr Collins.

“Prisoners’ voices needed to heard at the Consultation rather than be the stain of our history, causing us the cultural cringe and to sink into denial. Governor Macquarie in 1810 recognised the importance of inclusion: “that they must be shown that they had rights while they were still in the larval stage of convict serfdom” (Robert Hughes) said Mr Poynder.

“The Federal Government needs to pass legislation to enshrine Human Rights, especially including prisoners. It is time for us to understand the lessons of our past and give direction to other nations rather than echo the American failure” said Mr Collins.

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