



Media Release

Friday 9 December 2005

Australian prisoners speak out on Human Rights Day

Attempts to remove prisoners' right to vote will be confronted at the launch of a prisoners' statement, *Offer of Hope*, tomorrow, International Human Rights Day.

Justice Action spokesperson, Brett Collins, said prisoners have now drawn a line in the sand in their relationship with Government over this attempt to remove a fundamental democratic right.

"Prison populations are rising yet governments only notice prisoners when they can be used for cheap political point-scoring and fear-mongering," Mr Collins said.

"We must end the penal colony mentality now."

The *Offer of Hope*, which has received broad support (see below), is an expression of solidarity among prisoners and a positive offer to governments to help break the cycle of destructive vengeance in prisons.

It will be supported with a minute's silence, introduced by Brett Collins tomorrow, Saturday 10 December, at an International Human Rights Day rally in Sydney Town Hall Square starting at 11am. There will be a silent vigil at midday each Monday until there is a response to the offer by governments.

"Prisoners lose their freedom of movement but are still entitled to all other rights and safeguards provided to those outside prison. However, lately we have seen increased alienation through restrictions on family visits, on health and education and now the potential loss of the right to vote," Mr Collins said.

"In the last decade, the prison population has increased by almost three times that of the increase in the adult population. Justice Action condemns these policies which waste public money, cause the community unnecessary fear and allow prisoners lives to waste away in despair.

The Offer of Hope is supported by Senator Kerry Nettle; Dr Arthur Chesterfield Evans MLC; Peter Garrett MP; Lee Rhiannon MLC; The Public Interest Advocacy Centre; Sisters Inside; Prison Action and Reform-Tasmania; Deaths in Custody Watch Committee-WA; Indigenous Social Justice Association; Professor David Brown-UNSW; Mick Doleman, Asst Fed Secretary, MUA; John Maitland National Secretary CFMEU; Australian Aid for Ireland; Mercy Foundation; Redfern Legal Centre; Prisoners Legal Service-Qld; Stop the War Coalition.

<http://www.justiceaction.org.au/actNow/Campaigns/hope/hope.html>

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