



IPRT
Irish Penal Reform Trust

REFORM NEWS

DEC 2012

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS OF IPRT

A Turning Point? Looking ahead to 2013

As we reach the end of a very busy year for IPRT and for the Irish penal system, we would like to thank you, our members and friends, for your continuing support during 2012.

After a long period of depressing growth in prisoner numbers and a general regression in the regime and conditions for prisoners, we hope that 2012 may have marked a turning point. We are now beginning to see progress on IPRT's core campaigning issues: small steps towards accountability in the prison system; a commitment to reducing prisoner numbers; the removal of children from the prison system; and a growing recognition of prisoners' rights generally.

There is now an increased political commitment for penal reform in Government and within the Prison Service. IPRT has played and is continuing to play a key role in promoting reform – as the main source of new ideas for policy, and as the main campaigning organisation pushing for change. As we look back on 2012, we can see that our work has never been more successful – and has never had more potential for even greater impact.

At the same time, all of this progress is fragile. The penal system in Ireland continues to be beset by serious problems. A large proportion of prisoners live in inhuman and degrading conditions. Violence and intimidation remain at disturbing levels, affecting prisoners and staff. Many prisoners are not offered any meaningful activity during their sentence, and a large proportion of prisoners remain locked in their cell for most the day – sleeping, eating and using the toilet (where there is one) in a small cramped space shared with others.

As we plan for 2013, we know that if we can maintain our level of research and policy output, and if we can increase our campaigning activities, including our work with prisoners and their families, then we can achieve further major achievements for prisoner rights.

To do this, we need your support. With increased pressure on our funding sources, it is a continuing struggle to maintain our current level of activity. Your voluntary donations will directly fund the activities which are successfully contributing to radical penal reform. You can find out more about how you can support our work in this newsletter.

In the meantime, on behalf of the IPRT Staff and Board, we wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy and peaceful New Year.

Landmarks 2012

Positive developments over the past year

Government commits capital funding of €50m to build new children detention facility in Oberstown, and bring to an end the imprisonment of children in St Patrick's Institution by 2014. (April 2012)

Inspector of Prisons to conduct investigations on all deaths in prison, and – significantly – those recently released from prison. (April 2012)

IPS 3 Year Strategy includes commitments to reduce numbers; to renovate older prisons; and to end stopping out. (April 2012)

Spent Conviction Bill 2012 published (May 2012)

Complaints remit of the Ombudsman for Children extended to include boys detained in St Patrick's Institution; in force from 1st July 2012, this applies retrospectively for 2 years. (June 2012)

Commitment to develop a joint IPS/Probation Strategy for women offenders (June 2012)

Final 16-year old boy leaves St Patrick's Institution in August 2012; feasibility study underway regarding transfer of suitable 17-year olds out of prison system in advance of 2014. (August 2012)

Strategic Review Group on Penal Policy established, with Liam Herrick as member (Sept 2012)

New Prisoner Complaints Mechanism published in August 2012, and a panel of 22 external investigators recruited to deal with the most serious complaints; mechanism in operation from Nov 2012.

2011 REPORT

The IPRT Annual Report for 2011 is available from the office!

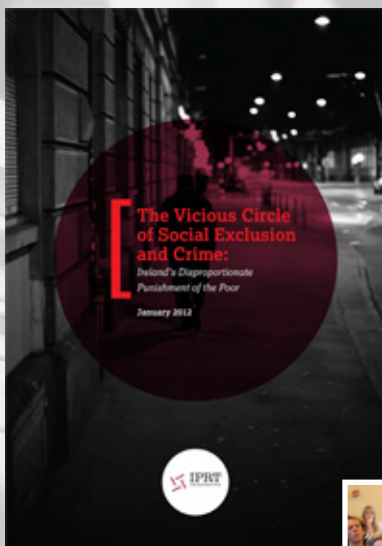
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The Irish Penal Reform Trust is Ireland's leading non-governmental organisation campaigning for the rights of everyone in the penal system, with prison as a last resort. In existence since 1994, IPRT has an established role as an independent voice in public debate on the Irish penal system. IPRT achieves its goals through research, raising awareness, and building alliances: www.iprt.ie



ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

IPRT began 2012 with the launch of *The Vicious Circle of Social Exclusion and Crime: Ireland's Disproportionate Punishment of the Poor*, which examines the impact of increasing levels of social exclusion on crime, and how the problem of crime disproportionately impacts on marginalized communities.

IPRT came together with the Community Platform on 2nd February 2012 to co-host a seminar around the connections between social exclusion and crime, and how to ensure that the social and economic cost of crime is fully considered in social policy development and in the budgetary process. Speakers were John Lonergan, former Governor of Mountjoy Prison; Prof Kathleen Lynch of UCD School of Social Justice; Tony Geoghegan of Merchants Quay Ireland; Orla O'Connor of the National Women's Council of Ireland; and Brid O'Brien of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed.

All IPRT publications are available for download from www.iprt.ie



CHAMPIONS OF PENAL REFORM

- President Michael D Higgins (patron since June 2010)
- Paula Meehan - poet (patron since May 2010)
- Peter Sheridan - author, director (patron since May 2010)
- Senator Ivana Bacik (patron since June 2010)
- John Lonergan - former Governor of Mountjoy Prison (patron since June 2010)

The IPRT Annual Report for 2012 will be published in spring 2013.

Here we present a brief review of highlights from 2012.



"An inspiring, moving event filled with hope."

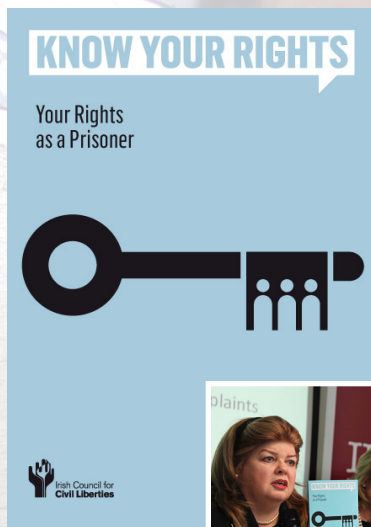
Pat Conway, NIACRO on The Old Triangle

CELEBRATING THE ARTS

Prison arts took centre-stage in Ireland's National Theatre on 26th February 2012 for 'The Old Triangle', an evening celebrating the work of artists in prisons and art by prisoners, hosted by poets Theo Dorgan and IPRT Patron Paula Meehan, with very special guest of honour, President Michael D. Higgins. There was an incredible generosity of spirit both on stage and in the full house, in what was truly a very special evening of community, compassion, and productive conversation about penal reform.

Many thanks again to the performers, Shaz Oye, Tony Curtis, GREENSHINE, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Eddie Cahill and Brian Maguire, Karan Casey and Niall Vallely, Peter Sheridan, Leanne O'Sullivan, Jimmy Kelly & Tom Crean & Brian McCarthy, and Christy Moore.

IPRT is very grateful to Poetry Ireland and to Sheehan & Partners for supporting this event.



EMPOWERING PRISONERS

A lack of understanding of prisoners' rights is one of the core obstacles to the vindication of those rights in practice in Ireland. In 2012, IPRT worked in collaboration with the ICCL in the development of *Know Your Rights – Your Rights as a Prisoner* to set out the relevant human rights standard applicable in Irish prisons and to empower prisoners and their representatives to enforce those rights.

The booklet is written in accessible language and the legal content approved by the Irish Prison Service. We also produced an audio version on CD, and have translated the booklet into Arabic, Polish and Lithuanian, with a Portuguese version due in 2013.

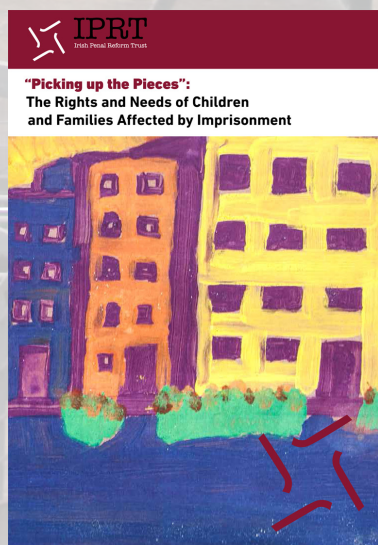
The booklet was launched by Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman, Pauline McCabe, in an event focusing on accountability in prisons. IPRT also held a series of launch events in four prisons, organised in cooperation with the prison education staff. At these, prisoners had the opportunity to raise human rights issues directly with IPRT; in turn, IPRT raised these concerns directly with the prison authorities.

IPRT is very grateful to the IRCHSS for their generous support of the IPRT Prisoner Information Project.

SENTENCING REFORM

Sentencing Reform In the background, IPRT continued to feed into policy throughout 2012 through submissions and engagement with policy-makers. For our Annual Lecture in September 2012, we hosted Judge Colman Treacy of the High Court of England & Wales, who addressed an audience in the atmospheric surroundings of Kilmainham Gaol on Sentencing Guidelines and the work of the Sentencing Council. The event formed part of the work of IPRT in the area of sentencing reform; previous actions in this area include papers and submissions on mandatory sentencing, on community sanctions, and detailed proposals on reform of parole, temporary release and remission.

IPRT is very grateful to KODLyons for their generous support of the IPRT Annual Lecture 2012: kodlyons.ie



GIVING VOICE TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Towards the end of 2012, IPRT shone a spotlight on a vulnerable group that has so far received little attention in Ireland: *"Picking Up the Pieces": The Rights and Needs of Children and Families Affected by Imprisonment* details the rights, needs and experiences of families and children of prisoners and is based on extensive consultations with children, families, support services and relevant agencies. The report was launched by the Ombudsman for Children, Emily Logan.

Feedback to the report has been tremendous; most importantly, in direct response to the report, an Irish Prison Service working group has been set up to examine the issues.

IPRT is very grateful to the St Stephen's Green Trust for their generous support of this report.

WHAT WE DO

IPRT is committed to reducing imprisonment, ensuring respect for human rights in prisons, and progressive reform of the penal system based on evidence-led policies.

This means the focus of our activities is on: the use of imprisonment, including sentencing policy; youth justice, with particular emphasis on early intervention; alternatives to custody and diversion; and the treatment and rehabilitation of those in detention. Everything we do is underscored by our commitment to combatting social injustice.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

IPRT relies on the support of its members, donors and charitable trusts to carry out its work. IPRT is not in receipt of any public funds; this contributes to guaranteeing the independence of the organisation, which we believe is essential to the integrity of our work.

Become a Member

By becoming a member of IPRT, you will be actively contributing to our research and awareness-raising activities – and you will thereby be making a statement that you believe progressive penal reform is necessary, and that there is a better, more effective way of dealing with the most vulnerable in our society.

Membership fees:

- Individual (€ 40)
- Seniors, students, unwaged (€ 10)
- Organisational (€ 80)
- Prisoner/ Ex-Prisoner/Families of Prisoners (free)

Subscribe online at www.iprt.ie/become-a-member or request a membership form from tel: 01-8741400 or email: info@iprt.ie

Make a Donation

Every donation, no matter how small, helps us to carry out our work. Donate online at www.iprt.ie/make-a-donation or send a cheque made payable to: The Irish Penal Reform Trust, Reg. Charity No. CHY 11091

Leave a Gift in your Will

IPRT is committed to ensuring that a legacy of equality, justice and human rights exists in Ireland for generations to come. You can help us by including a gift to the Irish Penal Reform Trust in your will. Any gift, of any size, is a valuable contribution to a better penal system for the future. For further information, please contact Liam Herrick, IPRT Executive Director on 01-8741400 or email: lherrick@iprt.ie



IPRT Board and Staff 2012.

All photos: Derek Speirs



WHAT WE DID

- 1 Submission to UN Body**
- 3 Submissions on Legislation and Policy**
- 2 Position Papers**
- 3 Prison Law Papers**
- 1 Research Report (Children and Families)**
- 1 Prisoner Rights Information Booklet**
(3 Translations & 1 Audio transcription)
- 1 Deaths in Custody Information Booklet**
- 17 Press Releases**
- 4 Newsletters**
- 80+ Press mentions**
- 40+ Online journal mentions**
- 100+ Radio interviews and debates**
- 14+ TV interviews**
- 6 Events in Prison**
- 7 Public Events**
- 2 Prison Law Seminars**
- 1 Annual Lecture**
- 5 Prison Law Bulletins**
- 1 Celebration of Prison Arts**
- ...and more!**

CONTACT US

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