**IPRT Annual Lecture 2011**

**Introductory Comments – Dr Mary Rogan, Chairperson of the Irish Penal Reform Trust**

Minister Shatter, Judge McGuinness and members of the judiciary, Senators, Deputies, Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As Chairperson of the Irish Penal Reform Trust, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you here this evening for the Irish Penal Reform Trust’s Annual Lecture for 2011. We are delighted that you have joined us for what promises to be a most interesting evening and I would like to begin with some words of particular welcome.

First to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Mr Alan Shatter T.D., you are very sincerely welcome this evening and we at the Irish Penal Reform Trust are delighted and honoured by your presence and your agreement to deliver our annual lecture. To your wife, Carol Shatter, our warm welcome also.

Our chair for this evening, whom I will formally introduce later, is Judge Catherine McGuinness. It is an honour to have you here and our thanks to you for being with us.

We welcome also the Senators and Deputies here present.

Welcome and many congratulations on your recent appointment to the position of Secretary General of the Department of Justice and Equality to Mr. Brian Purcell.

Welcome to other representatives from the Department of Justice and Equality, including Assistant Secretary Mr. Jimmy Martin and the Minister’s Special Advisor Mr Tom Cooney, as well as, indeed, those from other Departments and agencies who are present today.

We welcome too Dr. Maurice Manning, president of the Irish Human Rights Commission.

We welcome members of the Law Society and Bar Council as well as members of the media, in particular Mr Colm Ó Mongáin of RTE, and our thanks to you for hosting our question and answer session.

We are pleased to welcome Mr John Clinton, of the Prison Officers Association, as well as leaders and representatives of and from our fellow non governmental organisations.

A very particular welcome to those present who are members of the Irish Penal Reform Trust, and also to our patrons and founding members.

To those who have experience of prison and your families, welcome.

We extend a very warm welcome and thanks to our sponsors for this evening from the solicitors’ firm Kelleher O’Doherty Lyons.

To all of you present with us, a very sincere welcome. It is to our great delight that so many of you are here this evening and that I have so many to acknowledge!

1. **Background to Event**

This Annual Lecture is the Irish Penal Reform Trust’s main event of the year and has hosted a number of eminent speakers on previous occasions also.

In 2009 and 2010 we hosted two open forum discussions on the future of the Irish penal system with leading national and international thinkers and experts as well as key officials in the Irish penal system. We consider these events to be essential ways of not only hearing about new perspectives on penal reform, but also to generate debate and, more particularly, constructive and achievable suggestions to resolve matters of concern to IPRT existing within penal policy and the prison system.

This year, we are greatly honoured to have the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Mr Alan Shatter T.D. deliver the lecture and to set out his vision for reform of the Irish penal system over the life of the current Government and we look forward to hearing his thoughts and his plans with great interest. Judge McGuinness will introduce the Minister more formally in a few moments.

**About IPRT**

IPRT has been in existence since 1994. Our vision is for an Ireland which respects rights in the penal system and in which prison is used as a measure of last resort. We are working towards progressive reform of the penal system based on evidence-led policies and on a commitment to combating social injustice.

IPRT seeks to achieve its goals through effecting changes in policy, in practice, in law and through influencing public opinion.

To this end, we engage in a number of activities.

We place a great deal of emphasis on research and ensuring that our proposals and suggestions are based on the best available evidence in keeping with our values as an organisation. We wish to encourage informed public debate, assist in the production of achievable and sensible solutions to matters of concern and engage in and stimulate more and better research on the Irish penal system and on the matters which affect not only the lives of prisoners, but on penal affairs as they apply to us all.

We also engage with public debate and the media and seek to raise awareness of those issues we campaign upon.

We have also worked hard to form alliances supportive of our approach and our objectives. We consider it essential to work with policy makers and members of the Oireachtas to raise awareness of those matters we consider important, to criticise where necessary, but also to assist in the creation of solutions to the problems in our penal system. We are also deepening our links with the legal profession to encourage understanding of the rights of prisoners and to promote their vindication through the law.

We value our connection with those in prison, those who have experienced prison, their families and those working with them very highly, believing this to be our link to understanding how penal policy affects people most directly and to give greater force to our advocacy for change.

At present, the Irish prison system is facing a number of quite serious challenges. There are many and great concerns raised by overcrowding, conditions of detention, slopping out, criticisms by international human rights bodies, deficiencies in accountability structures. These cannot be separated from the urgent need to address and reverse what has been a drift to penal expansionism in Ireland over the last decade in particular, with the number of people in Ireland’s prisons now at its highest ever.

While the challenges are great, the Irish Penal Reform Trust believes this is also a time of opportunity. I consider it to be very positive indeed that we are now casting a cold financial eye across our penal policy and asking: is this how we want to use our resources, on the sadly often futile practice of imprisonment? How can we be more effective, more open and more just? To that end I am similarly encouraged by aspects of the report of the Review Group which examined proposals for Thornton Hall. Amongst other things, the report stated at page 80:

***We recommend that an all encompassing strategic review of penal policy should be carried out which will incorporate an examination and analysis of all aspects of penal policy including prevention, sentencing policies, alternatives to custody, accommodation and regimes, support for reintegration and rehabilitation, the issue of female prisoners and 16 and 17 year olds within the system.***

If I may say, this need is perhaps the most pressing one in our prison system at present. Without such a coherent, re-imagined and courageous policy and the input of all elements of the criminal justice system, but equally of social policy makers, health experts, statisticians, education officials, then everything else we do will continue to be in the order of putting out fires and trying to cope as best we can with perennial crises. The need for expedition and, of course, genuine implementation, is similarly great.

**Membership**

If you are interested in the matters of concern I have raised, in penal affairs and in supporting penal reform, we encourage you not only to make those views clear to your elected representatives, but to consider joining the Irish Penal Reform Trust. IPRT is a non-governmental organisation that receives no financial support from the State. This allows us to be fully independent in our work, but it means that we are dependent on the support of individuals and private organisations to sustain our research, policy and campaigning activities. In this regard we would like to express our gratitude to two of our main funders, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Atlantic Philanthropies.

The support of our members and donors is critically important to us. By becoming a member of IPRT, you will be actively contributing to our research and awareness raising activities – and you will therefore be making a statement that you believe progressive penal reform is necessary, and that there is a better, more effective way of dealing with some of the most vulnerable in our society.

The benefits of membership of IPRT include notification of and inclusion in all our events, access to our research and policy work, voting rights at our Annual General Meeting – and most importantly the chance to be actively involved in supporting the work of penal reform in Ireland! Individual membership is €40 and it is €80 for an organisation. Membership forms are on every seat and if you are interested in becoming a member please speak to any of the IPRT staff after our lecture.

**Judge Catherine McGuinness**

I would like now to introduce formally Judge Catherine McGuinness, our chairperson for this evening.Judge McGuinness was born in Belfast and educated in Belfast and Dublin, studying in Alexandra College, Trinity College Dublin and King’s Inns.

She was called to the Irish Bar in 1977 and to the Inner Bar in 1989. Judge McGuiness was appointed to the Circuit Court bench in 1994, and has served as a judge of the High Court and the Supreme Court.

In addition to her prestigious judicial career, Judge McGuinness has also served on what was An Bord Uchtála (the Adoption Board), the Voluntary Health Insurance Board, the National Economic and Social Council, and the Second Commission on the Status of Women. Furthermore, she has acted as chairperson of the National Social Services Board, the National College of Art and Design, the Employment Equality Agency, the Kilkenny Incest Investigation, the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and as President of the Law Reform Commission.

In 2010, she received a Rehab People of the Year Award for her pioneering, courageous and long-standing service to Irish society.

She is currently chair of the Irish University Quality Board, the National Council of the Forum on End of Life in Ireland, and Adjunct Professor of Law in NUI Galway. She is Patron of the Irish Refugee Council.

We are pleased to say that Judge McGuinness is also a long-time member of IPRT.

We are delighted that Judge McGuinness is here to act as Chairperson of this evening’s lecture. Our sincere gratitude to you, Judge. Please join me now in welcoming our Chairperson for tonight, Judge Catherine McGuinness.