



# IPRT Policy Statement for Election 2011

## 10 Steps to Better and Safer Communities

### **Our current response to preventing and punishing crime is failing and is becoming unsustainable.**

There is a unique opportunity for the new Government to enhance the protection of the community while at the same time respecting basic human rights standards. By identifying the most effective and cost-efficient responses to the social problem of crime, IPRT is now calling for all parties to commit to a broad programme of evidence-led proposals, leading to a more effective and a more humane penal system.

The economic and social benefits which our proposals can produce at this time of budgetary crisis have been well demonstrated in Irish and international research. **Put simply, it makes social and economic sense to place penal reform in a new Programme for Government.**

Here we present IPRT's ten priorities for creating better and safer communities. All of these proposals are backed up by solid evidence and research, available from IPRT. See [www.iprt.ie/election2011](http://www.iprt.ie/election2011)

### **1. Prevention and Early Intervention**

The most effective strategy in tackling crime is to target resources on those areas of social policy that are proven to be most sensitive to pathways of criminal behaviour. In particular, current investment in tackling drug and alcohol misuse and educational disadvantage, and in supporting primary healthcare (physical and mental) and child protection services, must be maintained.

### **2. Reduce Prisoner Numbers**

Our prison population has *doubled* since 1997 with little or no impact on rates of crime in society, and it continues to increase by up to 13% every year. This is unsustainable in light of chronic prison overcrowding and rising prison costs. A Government commitment to arrest this increase and to identify means to reduce our prison population is critical.

### **3. Alternatives to Prison for Less Serious Offences**

The first step towards reducing our prison population is to end the over-use of imprisonment for non-violent, less serious offences through the development and extension of alternatives to imprisonment. The full implementation of the Fines Act, the enactment of the Community Service Amendment Bill, and the resourcing of these schemes must be a priority. The continued resourcing of the Drugs Court and the Cloverhill Mental Health Prison Inreach and Court Liaison Service are critical in diverting offenders to appropriate services.

### **4. Review of Mandatory Sentencing**

A major factor in our increasing prison population is the large number of relatively low-level drug offenders serving long sentences. Our drugs strategy has placed heavy emphasis on mandatory and presumptive sentencing, which is proving ineffective in targeting organised crime. There is an urgent need for a review of mandatory sentencing laws in the context of an overall review of drugs policy.

## 5. Humane Prison Conditions

Conditions in our older prisons are in clear violation of basic human rights standards, exposing Ireland to legal challenge at domestic and European level. The priorities for any revised prison building programme must be:

- a) to provide humane and safe conditions for all prisoners.
- b) to address the sanitation and overcrowding issues at Cork, Limerick and Mountjoy prisons by fixed dates.
- c) to prioritise the development of smaller local prisons and open and low-security options wherever possible; this will enhance the economic efficiency of the system and allow the development of more effective and constructive regimes.

## 6. Accountability

Transparency and accountability are central to any area of public life where human rights are at stake. The successful operation of the Prisons Inspection system must be complemented by an independent complaints system. This can be established either through the establishment of a prison ombudsman, or through amending or extending the remit of existing bodies. The establishment of a specific mechanism to investigate deaths in prison is also necessary.

## 7. End Imprisonment of Children in Ireland

The current Government has failed to deliver on its commitment to end the detention of children at St. Patrick's Institution, which continues in violation of international human rights law. This must be addressed urgently by the construction of a child-centred detention facility for this group by a fixed date.

## 8. Review of Detention of Women

The increasing rate of imprisonment of women is a serious concern, not least because of the negative impact on families and communities. The progressive regime at the Dóchas Centre is being undermined by chronic overcrowding and conditions at Limerick Women's Prison remain unacceptable. A strategy to develop appropriate alternatives to prison and an open prison response to women's offending must be put in place.

## 9. Reintegration and Rehabilitation

A number of key practical measures will achieve a reduction in re-offending and successful resettlement:

- a. The passing of the Spent Convictions Bill should be a legislative priority.
- b. Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) should be extended to all prisons.
- c. Pre-release support for all prisoners in securing housing.
- d. Continuity of mental-health care and drug treatment in the community on release.

## 10. Making our Communities Safer

Building on the White Paper on Crime consultation process, a comprehensive National Crime Strategy must be put in place, which prioritises crime prevention in building safer communities. This will provide a platform for greater cooperation between all state agencies responsible for crime prevention.

---

### More information

*The Irish Penal Reform Trust campaigns for the respect of rights in the penal system with imprisonment as a last resort.*

IPRT proposals and recommendations are supported by solid evidence and research, presented across a series of Position Papers and Briefings available from IPRT. **For more details, see [www.iprt.ie/election2011](http://www.iprt.ie/election2011)**

### Contact

**T:** +353-1-8741400

**E:** [info@iprt.ie](mailto:info@iprt.ie)

**W:** [www.iprt.ie](http://www.iprt.ie)