

Monday, 15 October 2007

## News release

### **Imprisoned children trapped in “hotbeds of violence”**

The Howard League for Penal Reform has today (Monday, 15 October) published a table of figures for assaults in Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs), which reveals that over 18,000 assaults have taken place between 2003 and 2006.

Over four years, there were 15,565 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, 2,542 prisoner-on-officer assaults and 224 prisoner-on-other assaults in the 18 YOIs.

A recent Parliamentary Question by the Liberal Democrats revealed that 9 out of the 10 most violent prisons in the UK were YOIs.

Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform, Frances Crook said: “The National Offender Management Service estimates that 11% of prisoners involved in serious assaults are children, despite being only 3% of the prison population.

“The assault figures published today include the entire YOI population, of which a majority are young adults aged 18-21.

“But while not all the assaults recorded directly involve children held in prison, those children are at the very least witness to what goes on in these hotbeds of violence.

“Last week the Howard League for Penal Reform published a survey that found 95% of children in schools considered themselves victims of crime, despite the fact that schools are supposedly secure environments patrolled by adults.

“It seems that prison, the ultimate ‘secure’ environment and our other national institution for housing children, is even less safe. Small wonder that children come out of custody hardened and brutalised, with reconviction rates within a year of almost 70%.

“The vast majority of children should receive community sentences, with proven success at cutting reoffending. There are only a small number of children whose offences are so serious that they require custody and local authority secure care homes, not prison, should be the only appropriate secure accommodation.”

The table is published on the same day as an adjournment debate tabled by Mark Oaten MP takes place in the House of Commons on the Howard League’s submission to the

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on the treatment of children in prison.

The submission, published in June, found that the government is failing its obligations in at least 10 Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Despite a 44% decline in crime and no evidence of an increase in crime committed by children, England and Wales in particular continues to lock up more children than any other country in Western Europe.

In statistics published by the Council of Europe in 2005, England and Wales was found to have jailed an average of 2,274 children in any one week – compared to 1,456 in Germany, 628 in France, 73 children in the Netherlands and nine in Norway.

At the beginning of this month, 3,006 children were in custody in England and Wales. Of these, 2,512 were in YOIs.

### Further information

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### Assaults in YOIs, 2003-2006

PRISON	PRISONER ON OFFICER	PRISONER ON PRISONER	PRISONER ON OTHER	TOTAL
ASHFIELD	412	1,700	64	2,176
AYLESBURY	53	205	3	261
BRINSFORD	82	1,161	20	1,263
CASTINGTON	197	1,417	12	1,626
DEERBOLT	83	688	6	777
FELTHAM	515	2,170	17	2,702
GLEN PARVA	137	1,081	7	1,225
HINDLEY	121	634	10	765
HUNTERCOMBE	79	435	3	517
LANCASTER FARM	133	1,000	7	1,140
NORTHALLERTON	40	352	24	416
PORTLAND	132	467	5	604
ROCHESTER	67	331	3	401
STOKE HEATH	172	1,320	12	1,504
SWINFEN HALL	31	399	2	432

THORN CROSS	8	208	2	218
WERRINGTON	77	515	7	599
WETHERBY	203	1,482	20	1,705
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,542</b>	<b>15,565</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>18,331</b>

*Source: Ministry of Justice*

The House of Commons adjournment debate on the rights of children in prison takes place at the end of sitting on Monday, 15 October.

A news release on the submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child can be found at

[http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard\\_league/user/pdf/press\\_2007/UN\\_submission\\_on\\_the\\_Rights\\_of\\_the\\_Child\\_21\\_June\\_2007.pdf](http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard_league/user/pdf/press_2007/UN_submission_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child_21_June_2007.pdf)

Copies of the submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child are available to journalists on request.