Parliamentary Ombudsman upholds complaint of mal-administration and misfeasance in prison death case

3rd February 1999

A report by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Ombudsman), Michael Buckley into a death in Belmarsh Prison is to be made public today. The report is the result of the investigation into the death of Kenneth Severin who died while being restrained by prison officers in November 1995.

The complaint was made by Deborah Coles Co - director of INQUEST on behalf of the family through John Austin MP.

The report, which will be available at the press conference, expresses particular concerns about Prison health care and failings at a local and national level within the prison service to ensure that prison officers were properly trained in the dangers of control and restraint.

The Ombudsman finds the complaints "fully justified" and is highly critical of the way Kenneth Severin was treated in Belmarsh.

It is the first public acknowledgement by an official body that responsibility for the death of Kenneth Severin rests with the Prison Service.

The press conference will hear from the family of Mr. Severin, John Austin MP, Deborah Coles from INQUEST and the family lawyers. Interviews will be given.

Note:
Kenneth Severin was one of three black men to die following the use of restraint by prison officers between October and November 1995. Dennis Stevens died in HMP Dartmoor on 18 October 1995 and Alton Manning on 8 December 1995 in HMP Blakenhurst.

Evidence that emerged at the inquests into their deaths revealed unlawful and criminal wrongdoing by prison officers. Inquiries into these deaths either internally by the Prison service or externally by the Police have appeared to be exercises to excuse prison officers and management rather than holding them to account.

In these circumstances it has been left to the families of those who have died to pursue these cases. The families of all three men have issued writs and will be pursuing their claims to bring the Home Office, the Prison service and UKDS to answer before the High Court.

The families of Alton Manning and Dennis Stephens will also be asking the Parliamentary Ombudsman to consider looking into their cases and the common themes that have emerged.