

## PRESS RELEASE

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### CROSS PARTY WELCOME FOR INQUEST'S NEW BOOK - *DYING ON THE INSIDE: EXAMINING WOMEN'S DEATHS IN PRISON*

INQUEST's new book *Dying on the Inside: Examining Women's Deaths in Prison* was launched today in parliament at a meeting attended by cross-party MPs and peers. The book is the first comprehensive examination of women's deaths in prison in England & Wales between 1990 and 2007. It presents an alarming picture of preventable tragedy and the recommendations make fundamental proposals for change. The key recommendation of the book is the abolition of prison as the normal response to women who break the law and investment in radical community-based alternatives.

For the first time the book brings into the discussion the largely unheard voices of bereaved families, some of whom attended and spoke at the launch.

Chaired by Baroness Vivien Stern, Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for Prison Studies, the launch heard from the book's authors Marissa Sandler and Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST. Also speaking were Julie Morgan MP, member of the House of Commons Justice Committee; Jenny Willott MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson on prisons; and Kirsty Blanksby, twin sister of Petra Blanksby, a 19 year old woman who died in HMP & YOI New Hall in 2003.

Baroness Stern said:

*"I congratulate INQUEST on this exemplary publication. We don't need any more books, any more meetings about what is going wrong...we don't need any more recommendations; we need action."*

Julie Morgan, MP for Cardiff North and member of the Justice Committee, said:

*"These are all preventable deaths - that is the saddest point that can be made. I am committed to ensure that this issue is kept on the government's agenda."*

Jenny Willott, Liberal Democrat MP for Cardiff Central, said:

*"Prisons are effectively a dumping ground for people who are ill. This is not a party political issue, it's a human rights issue. Anyone with an ounce of common sense can see it needs changing. It isn't working."*

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# Inquest

Kirsty Blanksby said:

*"My sister died because she was a mentally ill woman who was wrongly sent to prison. I went through the same experiences as she did, but people believed in me – I went to the right place, a therapeutic community, which is why I am here to day, and she is dead."*

Deborah Coles said:

*"It is shameful that the same issues of concern apparent in the 1990s are as prevalent today. This report provides incontrovertible evidence of serious human rights abuses of women in prison and the abject failure of the criminal justice system in dealing with women in trouble with the law. The research is so conclusive that the solutions are self-evident.*

*We don't need any more reviews or reviews of reviews. We need the abolition of prison as the normal response for women who break the law and investment in radical, community-based alternatives must be prioritised. The complex reasons behind why women enter the criminal justice system – homelessness, poverty, addictions, mental and physical ill health and sexual and physical abuse – must be addressed as a matter of priority. Without the political will to drive forward coherent policy change the female custodial population will continue to rise and more women will die."*

Inquests into the deaths of four women in prison open on Monday 7 April 2008.

- **Vicky Robinson**, aged 26, died on 2 February 2005 in HMP New Hall. The inquest will be held at Wakefield Coroner's Court, 71 Northgate, Wakefield WF1 3BS, sitting before HM Coroner for West Yorkshire (Eastern District), David Hinchliff, and is expected to last three weeks.
- **Sheena Kotecha**, aged 22, died on 3 April 2004 in HMP Brockhill. The inquest will be held at Worcester Coroners Court, Bewdley Road, Stourport, Worcester, DY13 8XE sitting before HM Coroner for Worcestershire, Geraint Williams, and is expected to last two weeks.
- **Lisa Woodhall**, aged 28, died on 8 October 2006 in HMP Eastwood Park. The inquest will be held at Kings Weston House, Kings Weston Lane, Bristol BS11 0UR sitting before HM Deputy Coroner for the District of Avon, R, B, H Whitehouse and is expected to last one week.
- **Lyndsey Wright**, aged 30, died on 8 March 2005 in HMP Holloway. The inquest will be held at City of London Coroner's Court, Walbrook Wharf, 78-83 Upper Thames Street, London, EC4R 3TD sitting before HM Coroner Paul Matthews and is expected to last four weeks.

## Notes to editors:

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that provides an in-depth casework service to the families of those who die in custody. It undertakes policy, research and consultancy work on the strategic issues raised by contentious deaths their investigation, the treatment of bereaved people and state accountability.

# n q u e s t

Further Information	<a href="http://www.inquest.org.uk">www.inquest.org.uk</a>
Executive summary of <i><a href="#">Dying on the Inside</a></i>	
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