

PRESS RELEASE

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INQUEST CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ACT ON FINDINGS OF HMCIP ANNUAL REPORT

INQUEST today calls on the government to heed the recommendations in HM Chief Inspector of Prisons' annual report 2006-2007 and condemns the government for deliberately following penal policies that have led to the current crisis in the prison system.

HMCIP annual report notes a massive 40% increase in self-inflicted deaths in the last year and calls for a Royal Commission or similar substantial public inquiry into the penal system to holistically address its current problems. INQUEST welcomes such a call which we believe is an urgent necessity.

INQUEST also welcomes the report's criticisms of the juvenile custodial estate, an area of particular concern in light of the 30 deaths of children in custody in England and Wales since 1990. We urge the government to act on the report's recommendation for *"an overall review of the use and type of youth custody."*

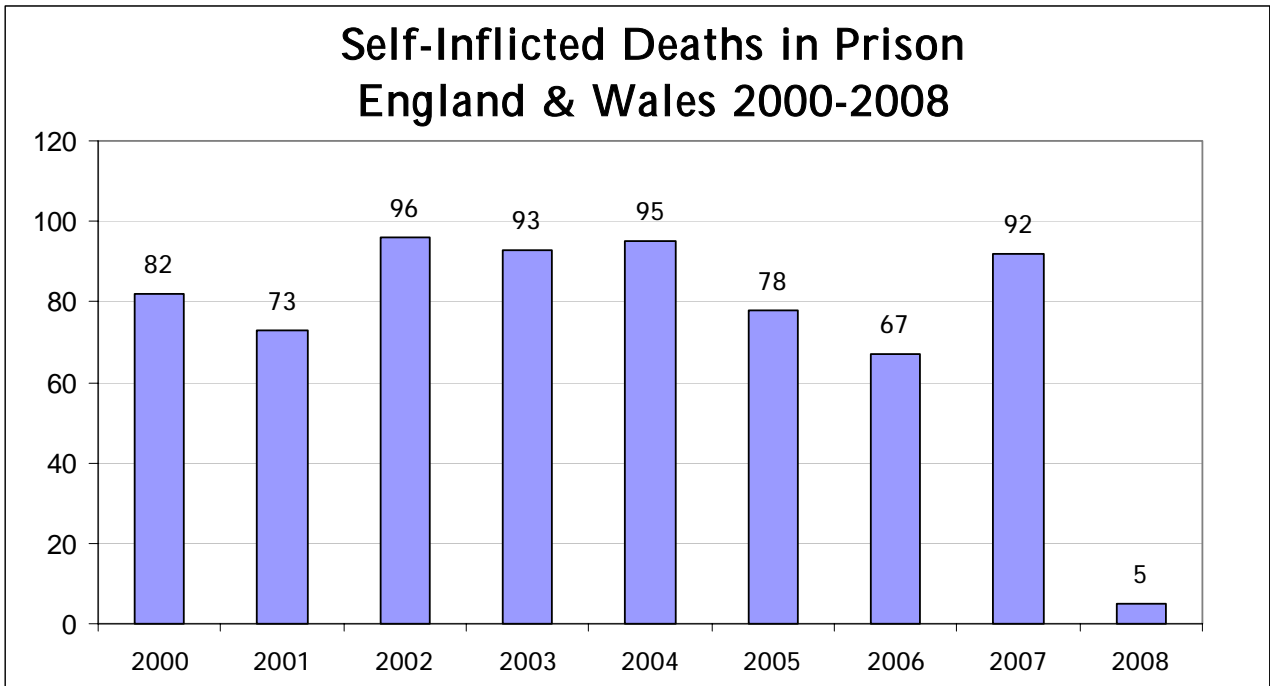
Deborah Coles, Co-Director of INQUEST, said:

"This report is a damning indictment of a prison system which is not fit for purpose as demonstrated by the massive rise in self-inflicted deaths in prison last year. No discussion of self-inflicted deaths in prison can ignore the regimes and conditions operating in prisons, criminal justice policies that imprison the mentally ill and vulnerable, or the institutional culture of violence and racism that exists there. Too many of the inquests we monitor expose systemic failures in the treatment and care of prisoners. Until urgent action is taken by the state to dramatically reduce the prison population the damaging and tragic consequences of imprisonment will continue."

Notes to editors:

1. INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroner's courts.
2. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England & Wales' annual report 2006-2007:
http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/docs/prisons_ann_rep_1_.pdf?view=Binary

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Source: INQUEST casework and monitoring

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