

## PRESS RELEASE

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### INQUEST DISMAYED BY FIRST DEATH OF A WOMAN IN PRISON THIS YEAR

INQUEST notes with sadness the self-inflicted death of 36 year old Alison Colk in HMP Styal on 8 January 2009, a prison with a disturbing history of deaths of vulnerable women.

Deborah Coles, Co-Director of INQUEST said:

*"It is deeply shocking that a woman has died one day into her sentence. Vital questions need to be asked about what possible justification can there be in sentencing a woman to just 28 days. Despite high level scrutiny of Styal prison, serious concerns remain about the safety and quality of life for women held there and why lessons from previous deaths appear not to have been learned. Unless more women are diverted from prison the increase in self inflicted deaths and the associated high levels of self harm, mental distress and family disruption will continue".*

#### Notes to editors:

1. This is the ninetieth self-inflicted death of a woman in prison in England and Wales since 1990. See [Dying On The Inside: Examining Women's Deaths In Prison](#) for an in-depth examination of the issues.
2. Since 2000 there have been 12 self-inflicted deaths of women in Styal prison. The inquests held into many of these deaths have raised serious concerns about the quality of treatment and care afforded women in Styal and the inappropriateness of prison for many of the women held there.
3. The Corston Review was published in March 2007. The government responded to the review in November 2007 and has failed to allocate any resources to its implementation.
4. 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 and conducts policy work on the issues arising.
5. INQUEST is campaigning to ensure that the Coroners and Justice Bill 2009 results in fundamental reform of an inquest system currently hampered by delay, inconsistency of approach and lack of resources and unable to fulfil its vital function of preventing unnecessary deaths.
6. The government must also make changes to ensure that bereaved families can participate effectively in inquest hearings by having equal access, alongside the police and Prison Service, to non means-tested public funding for their legal representation.

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# Inquest

Self-inflicted deaths in HMP Styal 2000-date					
Name	Date Of Death	Ethnicity	Age	Classification	Verdict
Alison Colk	08/01/2009	UK White	36	Self-inflicted	Awaited
Lisa Marley	23/01/2008	UK White	32	Self-Inflicted	Awaited
Helen Cole	03/06/2007	UK White	48	Self-Inflicted	Awaited
Valerie Hayes	10/05/2006	UK White	42	Self-Inflicted	Narrative
Julie Walsh	12/08/2003	UK White	39	Self-Inflicted	Narrative
Hayley Williams	04/06/2003	UK White	41	Self-Inflicted	Narrative
Jolene Willis	20/04/2003	UK White	25	Self-Inflicted	Narrative
Sarah Campbell	18/01/2003	UK White	18	Self-Inflicted	Narrative
Anna Baker	26/11/2002	UK Black	29	Self-Inflicted	Narrative
Nissa Ann Smith	10/08/2002	UK White	20	Self-Inflicted	Open
Donna Borg	05/04/2001	UK White	34	Self-Inflicted	Accidental Death
Sharon Wilkinson	02/04/2000	UK White	33	Self-Inflicted	Suicide

Source: INQUEST Casework and monitoring

Further Information	<a href="http://www.inquest.org.uk">www.inquest.org.uk</a>
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