

Prison should be used as a last resort for convicted women says PACE

On 28 April 2009 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) passed Resolution 1663 (2009)* which calls on the 47 member states of the Council of Europe to implement without delay the provisions of the revised European Prison Rules. Many women prisoners are the sole or main carers of children and the adopted text underlined the fact that given the disruption and emotional costs which may ensue to both mother and child(ren), 'prison should be used as a last resort only if no other options are available and alternative forms of sentencing, including community service orders and restorative justice approaches should be considered first'. The Assembly also formulated specific recommendations for the member states as regards the detention of mothers or pregnant women in prison, the health and educational needs of women prisoners, the organisation of visits, the respect for the human dignity of women prisoners and their social reintegration.

Liz Scurfield, Joint Representative at QCEA, was present in the PACE chamber when the unanimous vote was recorded. 'It was incredibly exciting being there as QCEA had helped prepare the report and recommendations' she said. Of the 41 recommendations in the report, 32 take up recommendations from QCEA's ground-breaking Women in Prison report published in early 2007. 'We now need to encourage all member states of the Council of Europe to implement the recommendations in the report' Liz said. 'We can build on this and the report on the situation of women in prison and the impact of imprisonment of parents on social and family life (also taking up many of QCEA's recommendations) passed in plenary by the European Parliament in March last year; the whole issue of women prisoners, neglected for many years, has become quite high profile and this is in no small measure due to the work done by QCEA, QUNO-Geneva and other Quaker agencies and groups.'

Advocacy on these issues done by Friends in their Meetings at national level now has serious chances of success.

* http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/ATListing_E.asp