Around Europe
Quaker Council for European Affairs
No. 279 February 2006

The Revised European Prison Rules

International human rights are frequently a slow and painful business but they took a stride forward at the Council of Europe in January. The European Prison Rules have not been updated since 1987 and the new version has many improvements such as an additional section on the prison regime emphasising time out of cell and prisoners' histories of abuse. And of prime interest to QCEA is the new (rather short!) section on women and another on infants.

With so little good news in the world it's a shame to bring the mood down but QCEA was hoping for more changes. The section on women, welcome though it is, is hardly detailed: '…the authorities shall pay particular attention to the requirements of women such as their physical, vocational, social and psychological needs…' this covers everything and nothing. We would like to see more concrete provisions made for women on specific issues, e.g. extended visits for children and all-female drug-programmes which have proved to be more effective for women.

Our Critique of the European Prison Rules was sent to Ambassadors at the Council of Europe and detailed many practical improvements. One was that the number, age and location of prisoners' children should be recorded at prisoners' entry to prison. At the moment there are no (or very patchy) records kept of prisoners' children. This disguises the severity of the problem and makes social service planning almost impossible; at worst it may endanger the safety of children. There have been cases of children left with temporary carers whilst their mothers go to court only to receive a prison sentence and be instantly sent down, causing unnecessary disruption and suffering in a child's life. Our other critiques include increased flexibility in the prison regime for pregnant and breast-feeding women and increased safeguards to protect female prisoners from abuse and violence.

So what are these revised Prison Rules? They are an adopted recommendation by the Committee of Ministers at the Council of Europe. They are not binding on member states but Council of Europe inspectors do visit prisons to see if the rules are being implemented. Why not have compulsory Rules which member states have to sign up to like the European Declaration of Human Rights? One good reason for optional rules is that this will ensure inspections. Binding agreements do not have inspections because states are supposed to have enshrined the principles in their national laws. Then there is the balance to be struck between good standards and the standards states are willing to sign up for. The sad fact is that states will agree to higher prison standards in a non-binding agreement rather than in a binding one. This is valuable because it allows us to put pressure on states, pointing to agreements that they freely signed up to.

The new Prison Rules are illustrative of wider trends in women's rights. Whilst women's issues are being included in mainstream international documents they lack the robustness seen in other areas such as anti-torture mechanisms. Some progress and a long way to go!

Charlotte Wetton

Our Critique of the European Prison Rules will shortly be available on our website www.quaker.org/qcea/womeninprison

For more information about the Council of Europe go to

http://www.quaker.org/qcea/briefings/peacetax/peacetaxbriefing1.htm

and www.coe.int

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ISODARCO 'War on Terror' Conference

Pugwash is an international scientific organisation which campaigns for the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction, and which is also concerned with other issues at the crossroads of science and world affairs. From 8-15 January, the International School of Disarmament and Research on Conflicts (ISODARCO), which is both the teaching arm of Pugwash and the Italian Pugwash group, hosted a week-long conference on terrorism. The course was entitled 'The War on Terror: Results and Costs from Europe to Central Asia' and brought together around 75 participants from 19 countries, including the United States, Italy and Russia. Other participants came from China, Japan and many European countries. ISODARCO was founded in 1966 by two Italian physics professors, so this event marked the 40th anniversary of the organisation and was the 6th session they have held on terrorism.

The course looked at the global response of countries and communities to the threat of terrorism and sought to question how terrorism arises in the first place. Although a lot of attention was given to the role of the United States, many different issues were discussed over the week. Several seminars focused on traditional issues tackled by Pugwash, such as the threat of nuclear terrorism. Other sessions were on issues as diverse as cyber-terrorism, the use of humanitarian aid as a propaganda tool, and East Asian perspectives on terrorism.

Each of the seminars started with a talk given by a principal lecturer, which was then followed by an opening up of the floor for questions and comments. Some points that were raised included

-the problem of reaching an internationally agreed upon definition of 'terrorism' – is this possible, and indeed, necessary?

-the problem of measuring progress in the 'war on terror' – when will we know who has won or lost?

-the question of whether the word 'war' was actually suitable given the nature of the conflict.

Historically, those attending ISODARCO conferences come from a great variety of professions and backgrounds, and this year was no different. Debates and discussion were had between peace campaigners and government advisors, professors of theoretical physics and lecturers of history, students of international politics and computer scientists.

The course was held in a picturesque town in the Italian Dolomites, and most of the participants boarded in the same hotel, coming together for meals and social activities as well as for lectures. For many, the opportunity to meet like-minded people was as enjoyable and valuable as the proceedings themselves, and many friendships were forged.

For more information on the activities of Pugwash and ISODARCO see www.pugwash.org

Joanna Sprackett

Joanna Sprackett joins QCEA as new Programme Assistant

My interest in peace, disarmament and human rights goes back many years and they are issues that I feel very passionately about.

Following the completion of an MSc in medical physics last year I volunteered for three months at an environmental and human rights organisation in London. I was Campaigns Assistant on a project focusing on the use of child labour in the Central Asian cotton industry.

I am a strong believer in utilising different methods of peaceful activism. In the summer of 2004 I attended the summer school of the Quaker United Nations Office and learnt about the approach of behind-the-scenes advocacy for which the Quakers are admired. I also feel the need to be a social witness and have been on many demonstrations in the past.

One of my main interests has been the ethical, transparent and safe use of science and technology in society. During my MSc I was a student member of Pugwash, an international scientific organisation which campaigns for the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction.

I feel privileged to be starting a job which promises to be both interesting and inspiring and which contributes to the valuable work of the Quakers in Europe.

Civil Peace Services in the 'Global Action Agenda - People Building Peace', New York 2005

(This article appeared in Around Europe No. 278 in German.)

At the request of Kofi Annan, the General Secretary of the UN, the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, based in the Netherlands, initiated a global campaign with the title 'Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)'. From the spring of 2004 onwards this partnership brought together 15 regional conferences of peace and human rights NGOs all over the world.

The aim, apart from networking, discussion and agreement of the contents of a global peace agenda was the development of regional action agendas. These, in turn, were the basis for a Global Action Agenda. This, entitled 'People Building Peace'[1] was handed over to the General Secretary of the UN and put before a global public on the occasion of a global conference in New York in July 2005.

Members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) were – often as part of other organisations – involved in the preparation and execution of the campaign. They contributed to the catalogue of recommendations directed on the one hand to civil society worldwide and on the other to decision makers at national and international levels.

The still very young Nonviolent Peaceforce received recognition in the form of a special mention of its pilot project in Sri Lanka. At the same time, the demand for civil peace services[2] is repeatedly emphasised in the final document. This is, at least in part, due to the positive experiences with civil peace services in Germany, which German Friends are also actively involved in.

This model of a 'public-private partnership' was already recognised at the first GPPAC regional conference in Dublin and thus found its way into the Action Agenda. The European Network for Civil Peace Services, now 34 organisations from 20 European countries, has also had a supporting influence on this demand for worldwide civil peace services.

In the final New York document, peace services are seen as offering solidarity and providing protection by accompanying people who find themselves in danger in conflict regions. They can support those who are working for peace; they can also provide recommendations to political decision makers on the basis of their grassroots insights.

In the spirit of 'rapid response' they can react quickly and unbureaucratically, support official peace missions through grassroots work and assist with the return of refugees in conflict areas. Peace services can undertake gender specific work and can build bridges between ethnic or cultural groups on the basis of their impartial status. They contribute to the prevention of war and violence in crisis areas and support the development of civil society structures.

Governments and international authorities are called upon to increase political and financial support to civil peace services and to integrate their work into other peacebuilding activities. The Global Action Agenda calls for appropriate training, scenario planning to prepare missions and mission evaluation for such services. It thus takes up and promotes demands which have already been made by the civil peace services in Germany and which have been largely turned into action there[3].

Helga Tempel

1 This is also the title of a compilation of "Successful Stories of Civil Society", which was published at the same time and which can be obtained from www.rienner.com

2 You can find further information about civil peace services on the following websites: European Centre for Conflict Prevention www.conflict-prevention.net,

European Network for Civil Peace Services www.en-cps.org,

Nonviolent Peaceforce www.nonviolentpeaceforce.com,

forumZiviler Friedensdienst www.forumZFD.de,

Peaceworkers UK www.peaceworkers.org.uk

3 Relevant quotes relating to civil peace services can be found in the Global Action Agenda on pages 7, 11, 12, 22, and 23. You can find the full text of the Global Action Agenda at: www.global-conference.net

News in Brief

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