



MEDIA RELEASE 19/01/12

PROTEST AT PRIVATISED PRISON HIGHLIGHTS CRITICAL SYSTEMIC FAILURES OF THE VICTORIAN PRISON SYSTEM

Last night's protest at the privatised Fulham Correctional Facility (FCF) in Victoria's east is yet another warning and condemnation of the impacts of failed policies of mass incarceration pursued by successive state governments.

With Victoria's prison rate rising over 40% in the past decade,ⁱ it is crucial for Victoria to be implementing effective decarceration policies and closure of prisons as is now occurring in parts of Europe and the U.S. Decarceration (a reduction of the number of people going to prison, and returning to prison) requires reinvestment in communities, healthcare, education and early intervention for those at risk.

Corrections Commissioner Bob Hastings suggestionⁱⁱ that the protest was caused by a change in toothbrushes and pay TV, trivializes the seriousness of the issues underpinning the protest. With over 845 men in a prison originally commissioned with a 590 bed capacity,ⁱⁱⁱ there are critical issues regarding overcrowding and safety.

Annie Nash, Manager of Flat Out Inc. says, 'Men imprisoned at Fulham who have protested on the basis of their conditions have done so at significant personal risk. They have not taken this decision lightly. The circumstances surrounding this incident must be very serious. A proper and full investigation of the circumstances leading to the riot is critical. The focus and energy of authorities should be on the underlying circumstances of the protest, rather than on punitive responses with individual prisoners.'

There have been multiple incidents where people imprisoned at Fulham Correctional Facility have nearly died or been seriously injured, and we are reminded this morning of a death in custody at the prison last April.^{iv} After the 1999 homicide of Paul Shaw at FCF, a Victorian Coroner found that Australasian Correctional Management (now the GEO Group Australia) contributed to the death by failing to provide a safe system of care.^v All critical incidents and conditions of confinement need to be publicly disclosed and independently investigated; it is unacceptable for Victorian prisons, and in particular private prisons, to operate in a vacuum of transparency and accountability and within a culture of impunity.

Media reports suggest that men involved in the protest at Fulham last night have been moved to Barwon and Port Phillip Prisons and may face criminal charges. It is crucial that these men have access to full legal representation and independent prison visitors, and that violent retribution against them is deterred by prison authorities.

Media contact: Annie Nash, Manager, Flat Out Inc. (03) 9372 6155 Mob: 0438 799 827

ⁱ Corrections Victoria (2009) Statistical Profile of the Victorian Prison System 2004/2005-2008/2009, Department of Justice Victoria, p.15

ⁱⁱ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/rioting-prisoners-from-fulham-prison-in-sale-have-been-secured-back-in-their-cells/story-e6frg6nf-1226248055608>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/01/19/3411064.htm>

^{iv} <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/inmate-to-be-quizzed-over-prison-bashing-death-20110516-1eoy8.html>

^v <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/jail-systems-failures-linked-to-prison-killing/2005/12/21/1135032080243.html>