



Quaker United Nations Office



Oral Statement

Agenda item 3: Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women Panel 1: Eliminating and preventing domestic violence against women and girls

Geneva, 19 June 2015

Thank you Chair,

Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) and Penal Reform International welcome the recognition [from Member States and panelists] that measures to eliminate and prevent domestic violence extend to all women. This must include women in prison.

The Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women's 2013 report to the General Assembly explored the links between violence and women's imprisonment stating:

“the undeniable link between violence and incarceration, and also the continuum of violence during and after incarceration, is a reality for many women globally.”¹

Statistics from studies undertaken around the world consistently show an alarmingly high percentage of women in prison have experienced domestic violence, up to 60%. In some cases these rates are three times higher than in the general population. Furthermore underreporting means these statistics are almost certainly significantly higher in reality.²

It is now recognised – and reflected in the UN Bangkok Rules on the Treatment of Women Prisoners – that domestic violence often plays a significant role in the lives of and pathways to prison for women, and has a negative impact on their experience in detention and post-imprisonment social exclusion.

The majority of criminal justice systems and prisons around the globe do not meet the complex needs stemming from domestic violence experienced by women in conflict with the law, and in some cases do not protect women from further violence at the hands of other prisoners or prison staff.

The experience of prison can retraumatise women, recreating situations of humiliation and subordination as well as putting them at risk of further physical violence. On release women

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women on Pathways to, conditions and consequences of incarceration for women (A/68/340), para. 2.

² Andrea Huber, Penal Reform International (2015), *Women in criminal justice systems and the added value of the UN Bangkok Rules*, http://www.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Added-value-of-the-Bangkok-Rules-briefing-paper_final.pdf.

may be forced to return to violent households if there are no safe shelters or if stigma acts as a barrier to accessing State protection.

The UN Bangkok Rules require criminal justice systems to take domestic violence into account, promoting appropriate alternatives to imprisonment and requiring prior victimisation to be taken into account at sentencing. The Rules further require that prison administrations are responsive to women's prior experience of domestic violence as a key element in rehabilitation.

We invite the panel to address the following three questions:

- How can national criminal justice systems take into account the impact of domestic violence on women who are accused or convicted of criminal offences?
- What can be done to improve the implementation of the UN Bangkok Rules, specifically to address the needs stemming from violence experienced by women prior to imprisonment?
- Can you provide good practice examples or steps being taken to address the impact of domestic violence on women in prison?

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