

Ministry of Justice  
102 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9AJ  
United Kingdom

Thursday, 11 July, 2024

**RE: Joint letter to the Secretary of State for Justice on reform of the Imprisonment for Public Protection Sentence**

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your appointment, which comes at a critical point for prisons and the wider justice system.

This joint letter has been endorsed by a broad coalition of experts, civil society and community organisations, leading activists and campaigners, opposed to the cruel, inhumane and degrading Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences, which have so far claimed the lives of 90 people serving IPP sentences in prison and a further 31 people that we know of in the community.

As leaders of criminal justice charities, trade unions, lawyers and campaigners, we wish to express our serious concerns about the ongoing scandal of IPP sentences and the intolerable position in which successive governments have placed prison and probation staff who manage those still serving these sentences, both in custody and in the community.

Working at pace to resolve the IPP scandal is the right thing to do. It would also make a tangible, politically palatable, contribution to addressing the urgent population pressures facing the prison system.

Given the urgency of the situation, we ask that the incoming Government undertakes to do the following, within the first 100 days of the new Parliament:

1. Bring all the IPP-related provisions in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 into force.
2. Publish the first annual report on IPP, which was due to be published by the end of March 2024.
3. Make a ministerial statement to Parliament, setting out the new Government's plans and timetable to address all the outstanding challenges affecting those under an IPP sentence.
4. Commit to set up an expert committee, in line with the recommendation of the former Justice Select Committee, to advise on the practicalities of a resentencing exercise, with the aim of beginning the exercise within 18 months.

IPP sentences were rightly abolished over a decade ago, on the grounds that they were unfair, unworkable and unjust in practice. Despite this, close to 2,800 people are still serving these sentences in prison, with more than 200 others held in secure hospitals. Even more

are living in the community under constant fear of recall for minor infractions, or even for mere accusations of wrongdoing. Most people serving IPP sentences and their families have lost all trust in the justice system.

This hopelessness has had a devastating impact on the mental health of people serving IPP sentences, both in prison and in the community, as can be seen by the three Prevention of Future Deaths Reports issued by coroners on suicides published in 2024. It is shocking, but not surprising, that coroners are now highlighting IPP sentences as a matter of concern relating to these suicides. One described the “inhumane and indefensible” treatment of someone serving an IPP sentence 15 years over tariff, and warned that “if action is not taken to review all prisoners sentenced to IPP then there is a risk of further deaths occurring”. Another coroner stated: “The jury was clear that the fact of the IPP caused his state of mind and so caused his death.” In June, news came that one person serving an IPP sentence, who was 12 years over tariff, had set himself alight. Another had begun his second hunger strike. The impact on the health and well-being of prison and probation staff looking after those subjected to IPP sentences is also profound.

The most obvious practical way to resolve the IPP scandal is through a resentencing exercise, overseen by a panel of experts. Indeed, in its September 2022 report, the House of Commons Justice Select Committee stated that resentencing is the “only way to address the unique injustice caused by the IPP sentence and its subsequent administration”.

IPP sentences are a problem created by Parliament, which can only be solved by Parliament, including through new legislation. We urge the new Government to honour its commitment, made in opposition, to “work at pace” to resolve this injustice.

We also agree with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Dr Alice Jill Edwards, that IPP sentences are human right violations that often amount to psychological torture. If this injustice is not resolved decisively, we could see the Government challenged in court for their failure to act appropriately.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours faithfully,

**UNGRIPP**

**Shirley Debono**

IPP Committee in Action

**Andrea Coomber KC**

Chief Executive, The Howard League for Penal Reform

**Richard Garside**

Director, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

**Pia Sinha**

Chief Executive, Prison Reform Trust

**Steve Gillan**

General Secretary, Prison Officers' Association (personal capacity)

**Ian Lawrence**

General Secretary, Napo

**Ben Cockburn**

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**Roddy Russell**

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**Andrew Morris**

Founder, New Wave Trust, and IPP On Licence

**Marc Conway**

Director, Fair Justice, and IPP On Licence

**Helen Schofield**

Chief Executive, Probation Institute

**Deborah Coles**

Executive Director, Inquest

**Tom Southerden**

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