

# ACT Women & Prisons & Community Coalition on Corrections

C/- ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)

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4 Sept 2008

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AUTHORISES ROUTINE SEXUAL ABUSE IN PRISON

"The Bill rushed through the ACT Assembly last week authorising routine strip searching makes a mockery of the boast that the new ACT Prison will be human rights compliant," declared Debbie Kilroy, President of Sisters Inside at the ACTCOSS Conference today.

"Strip searching is sexual assault by the State."

She told the conference that women in prison typically are in poorer health than women in the community and have a history of sexual and physical abuse. "It is appalling," she said, "that this so called enlightened ACT Government is prepared to sexually abuse women already traumatised by long histories of violence, both physical and sexual."

The new legislation means that the Government is also prepared to sacrifice its goal of a family friendly prison. Ms Kilroy noted that many women elect not to have contact visits from friends and family members when they know they will be strip searched afterwards. Families and friends themselves think twice about visiting when they realise the consequences for the women they visit.

In the Attorney-General's own words the Government admits that "we are aware of the humiliating nature of a strip search; we are aware of the intrusiveness; we are aware of the psychological impact that it can have on a detainee who is regularly subjected to such a search."

Women re-traumatised by repeated strip-searching are more likely to increase their drug-taking behaviours or engage in self-harming behaviors as coping strategies. Thus, strip-searching may directly contribute to the problem of illicit drug use and self harm in prisons, rather than prevent them.

In a breath-taking feat of twisted logic the Government appeals to its duty of care to prisoners to justify routine strip searching. Strip searching is not effective in keeping drugs and other contraband out of prison. 41,728 strip searches in a Brisbane women's prison made no discoveries of weapons or illicit drugs.

In the name of an in effective measure to exclude drugs from prison the Government is prepared to inflict systemic sexual assault on women and other prisoners in their care.

**Where:** Kippax Uniting Community, Centre, corner of Luke Street and Hardwick Crescent, Holt

**When:** Friday 5 September 2008, 9-9:45am

**Event:** ACTCOSS Conference

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