



Statement by the Irish Prison Service

Following coverage in the media today the Irish Prison Service strongly urges the Prison Officers Association (POA) to continue to work within the well established industrial relations machinery to resolve any issues of dispute. This is critical in order to ensure that the Service continues to deliver on its mission of providing safe and secure custody, dignity of care and rehabilitation to prisoners for safer communities.

There have been a number of comments in today's press concerning ongoing industrial relations issues between the Irish Prison Service and the Prison Officers Association. The Irish Prison Service strongly and absolutely rejects the assertions regarding management practices in the Irish Prison Service. These statements are inaccurate and misleading. On the contrary, prison service management have always held the door open for meaningful negotiations with the Prison Officers Association as a means of settling disagreements. In addition, there are well established mechanisms contained within the Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements which provide a framework for parties to engage, to address and resolve issues of implementation as they arise.

Recourse to industrial action while the parties continue to engage under these mechanisms, and without first having exhausted all avenues for resolution, is viewed by the Irish Prison Service as hugely disappointing and has the effect of further destabilising the industrial relations environment.

Over the past 4 years, very significant reform has been implemented in the Prison Service, to modernise the service and ensure that it operates in the most effective and efficient way possible. The IPS would emphasise that the policies which have given rise to these efficiencies, including staff reductions, were in all cases implemented by IPS management on foot of agreement reached after a significant period of consultation and engagement with staff representatives.

Regrettably, the threat of industrial action is completely inconsistent with a commitment by the staff side to the Haddington Road Agreement

It should also be noted that prisoner numbers are significantly reduced. To illustrate this, on today's date there are 3,776 prisoners in custody, which is 95% of the Inspector of Prisons recommended total of 3,982. By comparison there are 809 fewer persons in prison today compared to 2 March 2011 when the prisoner population stood at 4,585.

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