



Quaker United Nations Office

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Oral Statement on mental health of children of prisoners.

Delivered by Haifa Rashed, Quaker UN Office, Geneva, on 8 March 2013.

This is a joint statement on behalf of Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers) and the International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), focusing on the mental health of children, in particular children with a parent in prison.

We would like to highlight the recently completed EU-funded COPING Project,¹ which looked at the mental health of children of prisoners in Europe. On the basis of questionnaires with over 800 families, it found that 25% of children with a parent in prison are at high risk of mental health problems, significantly greater than children in general. Detailed follow-up interviews with children and their parents, and interviews with other stakeholders, found that children's resilience and ability to cope with parental imprisonment is related to their innate qualities, the stability that can be provided by caregiving parents, and to their maintaining a relationship with the imprisoned parent. Resilience is also closely linked to open communications and the child's ability to discuss their experiences throughout the period of imprisonment. Schools can be a major support to the emotional wellbeing of children of prisoners, and children benefit from maintaining good relationships with imprisoned parents, both directly through visits or temporary release of the parent, and indirectly through letters, telephone calls and electronic communications.

We recommend that States consider the major mental health issues that children face and how the resilience and mental health of children can be promoted as well as the health impacts for children of having a parent imprisoned or otherwise detained, whether or not the children live in the prison with the parent.

For more information on the findings of this research, and on the issue of children who have a parent sentenced to death or executed, please refer to our written statement to this Council session.²

¹ More information available at COPING Project website: coping-project.hud.ac.uk

² A/HRC/22/NGO/134