



9th April 2009

Press Release: Prisoner Voting

Former prisoner accuses UK Government of “paying lip-service” to democracy and human rights over prisoner voting.

“If prisoners are excluded from voting then we don't have a democratic society, we are just paying lip service to one.” says former prisoner Bobby Cummines.

Mr. Cummines, who served 13 years in prison, is now the Chief Executive of reformed offender charity UNLOCK. He accepts that many members of the public will question the importance of enfranchising prisoners but argues that Governments are elected to make the right decisions, not the most popular.

“Being worried about losing an election doesn't give you the right to pick and choose which human rights you respect.” Cummines says.

He believes that following the legal ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in 2004, which found the blanket ban unlawful, the Government's refusal to implement the ruling is damaging the UK's international reputation. “How can we judge other country's human rights abuses if we don't respect them ourselves? If you believe in the rule of law, you believe in prisoners voting.”

“We should all remember that this ban was imposed in 1870, when the suggestion that women should vote was considered ridiculous. Based on recent evidence, if we gave people the vote based on whether they deserved it, there might be a few MPs without the vote.”

Mr. Cummines hopes that votes in jails will lead more MPs to become interested in penal policy, leading to a more effective system, less re-offending and a safer society.

“There is a wide variety of political views in prison. People would be wrong to think that prisoners would all vote for shorter sentences and comfier pillows.

END.

Notes to Editor

1. Unlock, the National Association for Reformed Offenders, exists to achieve equality for reformed offenders. It is a unique organisation founded in 1999 by a group of reformed offenders, each of whom, in their own way, successfully rebuilt their lives after serving prison sentences.
2. Bobby Cummines (Chief Executive) served 13 years in prison, across two sentences, spending many years within the UK's high security prison estate. He is now one of the most widely recognised and passionate advocates of penal reform in the UK, advising Government and the Judiciary and regularly appearing in the media. He advised the Chairman in the Zahid Mubarek Inquiry.