

Media release

Saturday 22 October 2011

## **JUSTICE LEADERS CALL FOR COMMITMENT TO NO MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES**

This weekend's National Justice Symposium attended by judges, academics and senior figures in the justice system called for plans for mandatory minimum sentences to be scrapped.

In the keynote address of the Symposium, former Victorian Supreme Court Judge, Frank Vincent AO QC said that minimum mandatory sentences had the potential to not only lead to injustice for some young people but will also be counter to the long term achievement of a safe community.

"A humane system recognises that prisons are inherently damaging institutions, I know from nearly 50 years working in the criminal justice system that detention in a youth facility or an adult prison even for a very short period can have profound impact on the lives of young people."

"We need to work on basis of prison as a last resort. The research shows that putting people in jail makes it more likely that they will reoffend once released."

Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services said that it is vital that judges retain sentencing discretion because every crime is different and the circumstances of the case must be taken into consideration when sentencing.

"The impacts of disadvantage and complex needs, such as mental health issues, disability, drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness must be taken into consideration when sentencing."

"This meeting of some of the country's most respected leaders was aimed to promote an informed and intelligent public discussion and to move beyond knee jerk commentary about law and order," Ms Edwards said.

The symposium heard from the Victorian Minister for Crime Prevention and Minister for Corrections, Andrew McIntosh about the Government's plans for 500 extra prison beds to deal with current overcrowding.

Speakers at the symposium said these new beds should be used for rehabilitation and reform so that prisoners could be supported to re-enter the community.

Presenting at the Symposium today, Professor Tony Vinson said that greater priority needs to be given to programs that tackle disadvantage and work with families before offending behaviour begins. This includes a focus on education, training and opportunities to work and participate in society.

The National Justice Symposium, convened by Fr Frank Brennan SJ AO also heard from speakers and panel members that crime prevention, diverting people from prison and rehabilitation are all essential to increasing community safety.

### **MEDIA:**

**Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards and a range of Symposium speakers are available for**

**comment.**

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