

# Limerick women's prison conditions

— Open letter from Josephine Hayden, Republican POW

IN this open letter received by SAOIRSE from Limerick jail Republican woman prisoner Josephine Hayden gives a comprehensive account of the appalling conditions in C Wing for herself, the only woman political prisoner in the 26 Counties, and up to a dozen ordinary female prisoners.

It is intended to be used as an update on conditions for campaigners for political status for Josephine Hayden and for her release on humanitarian grounds.

It amounts to an indictment of the women's prison which should be closed immediately:

I am writing to let you know about the conditions at C Wing, Limerick prison. There are so many different issues that I'd need hours to explain so I will just list them off as best I can without making them seem matter of fact.

The last CPT (European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment) report (June 1994) stated that "a cell of five square metres is scarcely adequate as a living area for one person and it is entirely inappropriate to use such a cell to accommodate two people", a view with which the governor agreed.

"The CPT recommends that a high priority be given to the plan and that in the meantime steps be taken immediately to ensure that women prisoners are not held two to a cell in Division C."

1. All bottom landing cells have bunk beds and are usually doubled up depending on the number of prisoners.
2. Political, remand and sentenced prisoners are kept together.
3. Extremely damp conditions, nearly all walls and ceilings are peeling and in some cells the wall plaster has come off the walls from dampness.
4. All cell windows are broken and prisoners use a lot of toilet rolls to block the window holes.
5. Natural light is not adequate in cells. Artificial lights need to be on all day, even in the summer time.
6. Only two showers, one which is not working adequately and no attempts have been made to repair or replace broken showers. In effect one shower has to do up to 15 prisoners sharing cells.
7. Prisoners have to slop out. This use of chamber pots is most inhumane and degrading, especially for prisoners sharing cells.
8. Only one sluice for up to 15 chamber pots with the effect of the over-burdened sluice flooding every couple of days and often not being freed up or attended to for a couple of days. This gives the bottom landing the look and odour and health risks of an open sewer. (As of September 20 there were 15 women sharing 11 cells.)
9. No running water or lavatory in any cells.
10. Cell furniture very scarce, usually two lockers and chamber pot.
11. There are three toilets in C Wing, one of which is located in the "pool room". This is where the prisoner's food is served and kept in the fridge and on a bench. The toilet is in and part of the "pool room".

It is separated only by a 1/2 door which does not close fully or lock. It does not have a window or foul air extractor and the buckets and mops are kept next to the toilet. This room is also the laundry room. There is only one twin-tub washing machine to be shared by all prisoners.

12. The "TV Room" has five hard chairs only and the TV and video quality visually is often very poor and no efforts are made to improve/repair or replace the TV or video, sometimes prisoners have to sit on cold floors to watch 10-year old films.

13. The 'school' is a small room with peeling walls and ceiling. Equipment is scarce.

14. C Wing library consists of a wardrobe full of books. The male prisoners have access to thousands of books in the main prison library.

15. Prisoners have to continuously ask for cleaning agents and equipment ie mops, floor brushes, bleach, washing up liquid etc.

16. Rehabilitation activities consist of a pool table and two damaged pool cues, three tennis rackets (no tennis balls, only hand balls), one game of monopoly, two games of scrabble and the videos.

17. Mattresses are filthy and ancient, dirty duvets and dirty cells are given to incoming prisoners.

18. Appointments with the dentist can take several weeks, even months.

19. Prisoners with health difficulties have been refused heaters for cells.

20. Availability of exercise yard limited due to lack or "shortage" of staff.

21. Visitors to prison often have to queue on the public street and have their details taken there by officers. Visitors to C Wing have to wait longer than visitors to male wings.

22. Post is very often days or weeks late. Prisoners are told that the reason for this is because of staff shortage.

23. Some prisoners clearly need proper psychiatric care.

24. Courts often recommend that persons going to prison are allowed and encouraged to continue their treatment for addictions whilst in prison. Recovery is not encouraged.

(a) No detox unit

(b) No encouragement or support for recovering addicts/alcoholics/abuse victims etc

(c) No counselling

(d) No female doctor or medic

(e) No Narcotics Anonymous meeting

(f) No support or programme for mentally unstable prisoners

(g) No pre-release programme.

Well there it is briefly. I could probably list a lot more. A lot of people would probably find all this information useful.

**Josephine Hayden  
Republican Prisoner  
Limerick prison  
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