



Christians for an Ethical Society Canberra

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MEDIA RELEASE

New prison likely to outgrow capacity

"I fear that the new ACT prison will outgrow its capacity within as little as 5 and almost certainly within 10 years," said Professor David Biles, a distinguished criminologist.

He questions the assumptions behind the official projections that the 300 bed capacity will be adequate for between 20 and 30 years.

Professor Biles will be sharing the platform with the Attorney-General, Simon Corbell, at a forum on Wednesday evening at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Barton.

"The main assumption behind the official projections," continued Prof. Biles, "is that the ACT's extraordinarily low rate of sentencing to prison by ACT courts will not change."

"With the best will in the world the rate is bound to increase even if only slightly. Cutting off contact with families has been a big consideration behind the reluctance of Courts to send prisoners to NSW - a consideration that will no longer apply with a local prison."

According to Prof. Biles merely a small increase in imprisonment will be enough to fill the prison rapidly and reduce the extraordinarily high level of community based orders. At present in the ACT there are 6.6 people serving these orders for every one sent to prison. The average across Australia is just 2 to 1.

Mr Corbell will speak on what is planned for the new prison and what it will achieve. Professor Biles will speak on "How the ACT compares: the facts and figures on prisoners and prisons in Australia."

This Forum is the second of three that Christians for an Ethical Society or CES – Canberra is organising on prisons. The third forum on 8 May will look at mental health and prisons.

The CES chose to focus on the new prison because it so closely engages Christian ethics in at least three ways: concern for the outcast, ensuring justice to the disadvantaged and bringing about healing for the victim and the community.

Time of forum: 7:30pm Wednesday 19th March 2008.

Venue: Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, cnr Kings Ave & Blackall St, Barton

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