# Exclusion of IPP prisoners from release measures sparks fresh human rights concerns



The exclusion of prisoners currently serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences from new measures aimed at alleviating the UK's prison overcrowding crisis has drawn sharp criticism and highlighted ongoing concerns about human rights and justice reform. The announcement from Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood regarding the automatic release of certain recalled prisoners after 28 days has been described as a missed opportunity, particularly for those trapped under the controversial IPP regime, which has been labelled both morally and ethically problematic.

Introduced in 2005 as a means to combat crime, IPP sentences were designed to keep offenders incarcerated until they could demonstrate they no longer posed a risk to society. However, these sentences, which were abolished in 2012 due to mounting human rights concerns, were not applied retrospectively. As a result, an estimated 2,900 individuals remain incarcerated under an IPP sentence, with many having served significantly longer than their original minimum terms. Some, like Thomas White and Abdul Suleman, have been imprisoned for nearly two decades for relatively minor offences.

Campaigners and legal experts have voiced deep concerns regarding the psychological toll on these prisoners. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Alice Jill Edwards, has urged the UK government to re-evaluate all indefinite sentences, stressing that the current system perpetuates severe psychological distress. Edwards has pointed out that a disturbing 94 IPP prisoners have taken their own lives while in custody, a startling figure that underscores the urgency for reform.

The Justice Committee in Parliament has also decried these sentences, labelling them "irredeemably flawed" and advocating for a comprehensive resentence programme. This committee's findings echo wider calls for reform, noting that substandard support services have contributed to a vicious cycle dubbed the "recall merry-go-round." Many of these prisoners have not committed any additional crimes, yet remain incarcerated due to minor breaches of stringent licence conditions. According to a spokesperson for the United Group for Reform of IPP (UNGRIPP), the government is missing a chance to alleviate prison overcrowding while wasting taxpayer money on maintaining these outdated sentences.

Activists and family members of IPP prisoners express frustration and outrage at the ongoing neglect of this issue. Mandy Lawrence, mother of James, who has been imprisoned for over 19 years—well beyond his minimum tariff—has described the situation as “disgusting”, lamenting that IPP prisoners continue to be overlooked. Additionally, campaigner Shirley Debono has referred to the exclusion from release measures as another “slap in the face” for families and advocates fighting for justice.

The implications of this exclusion extend beyond mere statistics. Reformed IPP prisoner Marc Conway has articulated the despair felt by many IPP inmates, stating, “It feels like if you are IPP you are being punished again and again and again.” He highlighted the heightened risk of self-harm among these individuals, warning that neglect in addressing their plight may lead to further tragic outcomes.

Experts label the government's approach as insufficient, noting that while rapid responses to current prison crises are necessary, a more fundamental, systemic change is needed to address the underlying issues of IPP sentencing. Richard Garside of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies has emphasised that the government’s current measures, which focus on those serving determinate sentences, are merely “tinkering” with a much larger problem.

While the Ministry of Justice insists that the Parole Board evaluates IPP prisoners for potential release every two years and that all offenders serving sentences of four years or more are excluded from the recent release initiatives, the ongoing plight of IPP prisoners remains a glaring issue. Critics argue that without bold, comprehensive reforms, including the potential re-sentencing of these individuals, the UK risks perpetuating a system that is increasingly tarnished by allegations of cruelty and ineffectiveness.

The stark reality is that thousands of prisoners remain mired in a system that many deem indefensible and inhumane. Until the government takes meaningful action to rectify the injustices of the IPP regime, the outcry for reform will persist, underlining a critical and urgent need for change within the UK justice system.

### Reference Map

1. Exclusion from emergency measures and criticisms.
2. UN's call for review of IPP sentences.
3. Justice Committee's findings on IPP sentences.
4. UN expert's concerns regarding psychological impact.
5. UN's criticism of government's justification for indefinite detention.
6. Coalition calls for IPP reforms.
7. Commentary on the implications of the IPP policy.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/ipp-scandal-prisons-full-early-release-b2751855.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/aug/30/un-torture-expert-urges-uk-government-to-review-all-indefinite-sentences> - UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Alice Jill Edwards, has urged the UK government to review all indefinite sentences, including Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. She highlighted the severe psychological distress caused to prisoners and their families, noting higher rates of self-harm and suicide among IPP prisoners. Edwards emphasized that the current system may violate human rights obligations and called for urgent reforms to address these issues.
3. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/102/justice-committee/news/173280/justice-ipp-sentences-report-published-22-23> - The UK Parliament's Justice Committee has described IPP sentences as 'irredeemably flawed' and called for a comprehensive re-sentencing program. The committee found that inadequate support services have led to a 'recall merry-go-round,' with many prisoners serving sentences much longer than their original terms. They recommended re-sentencing all current IPP prisoners and improving rehabilitation programs to facilitate their release.
4. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140237> - A UN expert on torture has called for an urgent review of the UK's Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentencing scheme. As of the end of 2022, nearly 2,900 people remained incarcerated under this scheme, which was abolished in 2012 but not applied retrospectively. The expert highlighted the severe psychological distress experienced by these inmates, including elevated instances of self-inflicted harm and suicide.
5. <https://news.sky.com/story/ministers-using-misleading-claims-to-justify-indefinite-detention-says-un-torture-expert-13071816> - Alice Jill Edwards, the UN's special rapporteur on torture, criticized the UK government for using 'misleading' arguments to justify the continued indefinite detention of individuals under the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) regime. Despite the scheme being abolished in 2012, nearly 3,000 people remain incarcerated under it. Edwards argued that detaining individuals in 'perpetual uncertainty' is 'inhuman' and called for a review of these sentences.
6. <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/mental-health-human-rights-and-criminal-justice-bodies-unite-for-reforms-to-address-the-stain-of-the-ipp-sentence/> - A coalition of mental health bodies, human rights charities, and criminal justice organizations has called for reforms to address the 'stain' of the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence. The coalition includes the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Amnesty International, and the Prison Reform Trust. They support amendments to the Victims and Prisoners Bill to address the issues associated with IPP sentences, which were abolished in 2012 but remain in effect for many individuals.
7. <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2023/12/imprisonment-for-public-protection-the-greatest-single-stain-on-the-uk-justice-system/> - A legal commentary discusses the legacy and lasting consequences of the UK's Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) policy. The author highlights cases where individuals sentenced to as little as two years have found themselves incarcerated for decades due to the IPP regime. The commentary emphasizes the international condemnation of the policy and its impact on the UK's criminal justice system.