

**Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends  
Minute on Prison Abolition**

**The following was approved by Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in 1981 (Minute 93).**

We approve the following Statement on Friends Response to Crime:

Friends, partly through their own experiences in the prisons of the seventeenth century, became concerned about the treatment of the accused or convicted. Friends witnessed to their concern for the Divine Spirit in humans by seeing prisons as an alternative to corporal or capital punishment. Subsequently, they worked for reform of these prisons. Today, Friends are becoming aware that prisons are a destructive and expensive failure as a response to crime. We are, therefore, turning our efforts to reform prisons to efforts to replace them with non-punitive, life-affirming and reconciling responses.

The prison system is both a cause and a result of violence and social injustice. Throughout history, the majority of prisoners have been the powerless and the oppressed. We are increasingly clear that the imprisonment of human beings, like their enslavement, is inherently immoral and is as destructive to the cagers as the caged.

The challenge before us is to use alternatives based on economic and social justice and on the fulfillment of human needs. Some alternatives to prisons have already been developed and more are needed to bring about reconciliation and healing within the community. Friends need to seek out, develop and support such programs. At the same time, we need to foster awareness in ourselves and others of the roots of crime and violence in society to ensure that our lives do not unintentionally reinforce these evils.

Prison abolition is both a process and a long-term goal. In the interim, there is a great need for Friends to reach out to and to support all those affected: guards, prisoners, victims and families.

We recognize a need for restraint of those few who are exhibiting dangerous behaviour. The kind of restraint used and the help offered during this time must reflect our concern for that of God in every person.”