‘Doing Nothing Is Not an Option’: Recent Milestones towards Improving Prison Conditions and Addressing Overcrowding

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**Summary:** Following decades of neglect and inaction on the part of the Irish State, this paper focuses on recent milestones towards safeguarding the most basic human rights of prisoners with regard to steps taken (a) to improve living conditions (most notably by providing in-cell sanitation, thereby eliminating the inhuman and degrading practice of ‘slopping out’) and (b) to address overcrowding through increased use of Community Service Orders and novel schemes such as Community Return. The paper also discusses the contributions of the Thornton Hall Review Group, the Sub-Committee on Penal Reform and the Irish Penal Reform Trust in prompting a much-needed rethink of prison policy.

**Keywords:** Prisons, prison conditions, overcrowding, human rights, prison policy, decarceration, courts, sentencing, Community Service, Community Return.