

# CRIME PREVENTION A STRATEGY FOR NEW ZEALAND

## An NZPARS Review

The New Zealand Government recently announced a new initiative on crime. This will be achieved by:

- The Government taking the lead in developing a strategic, co-ordinated and managed approach to the problems of crime.
- Greater community involvement in crime prevention and the criminal justice system.

The New Zealand Prisoners' Aid and Rehabilitation Society (Inc.), NZPARS, applauds this move towards crime prevention. There is a recognition that responses to crime must include more than just an increase in police and harsher sentences. Effective crime prevention is not new. Holland has had a Crime Prevention Strategy since 1985, whilst France has had a Crime Prevention Council since 1983. A Crime Prevention Strategy has been up and running in South Australia since 1989.

One of the positive aspects of the New Zealand strategy is that a crucial component of central Government co-ordination will be to focus all relevant departments on crime prevention outcomes as part of their broader policy development work. It will recognise the fact that potential offenders are likely to be concentrated in particular social groups whose positions in the labour market are liable to be weak or marginal.

The Strategy involves the development of a co-operative approach by the Government in conjunction with local authorities, Iwi, Pacific Island groups etc, to advance an integrated crime prevention strategy.

There will be grass roots representation on consultative and co-ordinating bodies. Too often the representatives on such bodies come from the more powerful sectors of society, and those who are supposed to be recipients of the services do not have an effective voice.

The Government announced seven particular crime prevention goals. The reason for selecting these seven goals appears somewhat arbitrary. For instance, the area of tertiary prevention, directed at the prevention of re-offending, has been omitted. It is argued that programmes directed at serious offenders tend to be resource

intensive and their cost effectiveness must be questioned. Yet the research suggests (Andrews Et Al) (1990), McLaren (1992)) that therapeutic intervention is a cost effective means of reducing recidivism when the social learning model is applied.

Also the Strategy Paper on crime prevention also omits to mention the potential for reducing re-offending by adopting the recommendation of the Prison Review Report, 1989, for the development of a range of "Habilitation Centres" for a large proportion of the prison population.

The seven goals with some brief NZPARS comments are:

**Goal 1 - Improve Support for At Risk Families.** Various means of are outlined intervening with at-risk families. However the reality is that parenting requires access to adequate social and economic resources including houses, education and work.

**Goal 2 - Reduce the Incidence of Family Violence.** Societies that are unable to deliver resources on an equitable basis are those which are most likely, it would seem, to experience high rates of crime and crimes with violence.

**Goal 3 - Encourage Preventative Programmes For Young People at Risk of Offending.** The Government must resist the temptation to thrust the entire blame for youth offending upon the shoulders of young people.

**Goal 4 - Minimise the Involvement of Casual Offenders with the Criminal Justice System.** This goal appears laudable however, NZPARS notes in the Strategy paper on Crime Prevention Report that there is currently no evidence that diversionary programmes involving young people do actually prevent re-offending. There is concern as to why it was included as one of the 7 Crime Prevention Goals.

**Goal 5 - Develop a Management Plan for Alcohol and Druge Abuse Programmes.** No doubt there is some room to rationalise the programmes for alcohol and drug abuse. However, NZPARS sees dangers. Programmes often differ because they are tailored to different client groups. Rationalisation may result in a

decrease in the programmes available, many of which involve a large amount of volunteer and community support.

**Goal 6 - Develop a Strategy to Address the Incidence of White Collar Crime.** Since the 1987 share market crash white collar crime has been on the increase in New Zealand and there has been an attempt to effect a larger number of prosecutions in this area. When and if the rising tide of inflation and profits return such offending will not doubt be less visible. It is difficult to see what the community can do generally about curbing or preventing such crime.

**Goal 7 - Address the Concerns of Victims and Potential Victims.** This goal could be rephrased to read "Reduce the opportunity for crime". It is recognised that there has been a shift from a welfare state towards one which emphasises individual responsibility, and individuals do have a responsibility to take reasonable precautions to reduce the risk of becoming victims of crime. There is however, a danger of blaming the victim and the argument that victims often become offenders only reinforces that attitude. The Victims Task Force has been disbanded and moving victim support into a strategy for crime prevention may only confuse matters. Support for victims should be an end in itself.

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If the Safety Community Councils, which are being trialed in four districts, prove successful, then perhaps this will be the model for local consultation and co-ordination. At a national level it will be interesting to see what form of group is structured and how its powers will be defined.

NZPARS is relieved that the Government has at last woken up to the fact that traditional responses to crime are ineffective. We welcome an approach which promises action across a broad front and identifies the responsibility for crime prevention at national local and individual levels.

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all those who contributed  
to the preparation for its  
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