



I focus

andrew azzopardi

Prof Andrew Azzopardi
Dean Faculty for Social
Wellbeing,
University of Malta &
Broadcaster - 103 FM
Malta's Heart

www.andrewazzopardi.org

The facts and cell 23

What if Kim was your daughter and was found hanged?
What if Colin was your son and was found hanged?

What other 'facts' does anyone need to realise that things at the Prisons are nowhere near bonhomous?

Dr Byron Camilleri, the Minister for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement has been recently quoted in the Sunday edition of this newspaper that he "takes decisions based on facts..." What I cannot understand is that the facts are there for all to see - actually he is up to his tonsils with facts, but I will oblige to make it easier for him to have it all in front of him.

Fact 1: Martin Borg Nicolas Virtu, father of Kim (29 years old), who committed suicide in prison and died some days later in Mater Dei will "initiate legal proceedings in the constitutional court this week claiming his daughter was subjected to torture and inhumane treatment while in prison. Martin Borg Nicolas Virtu is also claiming that his daughter Kim's fundamental human right to life had been breached by the state." (*timesofmalta* - 19/9/2021). This situation on its own should be a good enough reason to free the Director Colonel so that he can defend his name against these allegations and, in the process, does not keep pulling down the Institution with him now that he has become the face of the regime in CCA.

Fact 2: In an interview on the *timesofmalta.com* with Martin Borg Nicholas Virtu, Kim's dad, it was stated that, "An MRI scan three days after being admitted to hospital revealed three broken ribs on her [Kim's] right side". Now I wonder if people realize that you are in excruciating pain even if you bruise

your ribs, let alone. Where did this come from, a fall, a quarrel, a beating? Whatever the reason that family were allegedly not informed is as bad as it comes, procedurally, ethically and all the rest.

Fact 3: An alleged frame-up of Anthony Borg, a former inmate, was revealed by prison activist Peppi Azzopardi. Ostensibly, purportedly confidential information was leaked faultily to a news portal. This is the same ex-inmate who spoke about prison, citing some very serious allegations in a scathing interview on the *timesofmalta.com*.

Fact 4: 13 inmates have died in 3 years at the Corradino Correctional Agency, a number of which as a result of suicide. Some of the reason for the deaths are still unknown to us. Most of the Inquiries, if they have even happened, were not made public - big doubts ensue.

Fact 5: 2 Prison Officials, who in the chain of command respond to the Deputy Director and Director, are being accused of involuntary murder hoping against all hope that all of this will rest only on their shoulders.

Fact 6: Colin Galea died eight days after his attempted suicide at the Prisons. This sparked an inquiry on whether mental health procedures at the prison are up to scratch. His mother showed clear doubts on the level of care he was getting considering he had a history of mental health.

Fact 7: I have, together with colleagues, produced a detailed report that shows that solitary confinement is a precursor of serious mental health problems and even suicide, and yet it is not only used indiscriminately but repeated reports indicate that procedures are not being adhered to. Former inmates (the Minister might be interested in meeting people who finish their 'time') report the use of solitary confinement at the click of a prison official's finger.

Fact 8: The Director Colonel took pleasure in making me listen to a prisoner in solitary confinement crying for his mother. If this is not warped or inhumane, what is?

Fact 9: Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics 2020 evidence serious procedural and operative deficiencies.

Fact 10: Malta has the highest rate of imprisonment in Europe.

Fact 11: The Director Colonel has often been applauded by the Minister and yet the latter, in reply to a parliamentary question, confirmed that prisoners still need to be restrained, confirming that the disciplinary model being used is not working.

Fact 12: The Minister orders an Inquiry to evaluate prison procedures, in particular those related to the prevention of suicide and mental health. The fact that he orders such an Inquiry indicates doubt.

Fact 13: Research shows that our prisons are full of members of intergenerational crime families and no known program has been designed and devised to interrupt that cycle.

Fact 14: Newspapers have reported, and the Director Colonel has confirmed, that he decides on who gets the 'privileges' (for example those having a swim with him) and this on the whim with no clear Standard Operating Procedures or Protocols known to prisoners, prison officials or stakeholders.

Fact 15: The Minister is talking about reform and stopping short of defending the Director Colonel as he has been doing this last year and a half. In the interview with *The Malta Independent* on Sunday it seems that he doesn't put it pass him to make changes.

Fact 16: Lack of prison education and prison work - essential components in rehabilitation. Less than 10% (70 inmates) of the prison population are involved. A Manager at the Prison admits this himself on One TV.

Fact 17: Recidivism is sky high - clear evidence that the prison rehabilitation is not working, and our communities are nowhere near safer because of that.

Fact 18: The Prison regime tried to set up a propaganda campaign on TVM to influence the public opinion. Peppi Azzopardi and I got to know about it and the Broadcasting Authority ordered a remedy to the clip that had been broadcasted. We are informed that a whole set of equally deceiving clips were stopped from being broadcasted as a result.

Fact 19: Photos have been leaked of a whole array of makeshift arms (and others you can easily find hanging in a workshop, like screw drivers and hammers) as evidence that the Director

Colonel has stopped violence, but no known police reports were made following these finds.

Fact 20: A restraint bed has been used as reported in the media.

Fact 21: A number of editorials of *The Malta Independent*, *Malta Today* and *Times of Malta* have been written to show the worrying situation in the prisons. An endless list of opinion pieces, journalistic articles, investigative stories and radio, TV and portal features have been published speaking against the current regime.

Fact 22: The prison is overpopulated, and the Ministry did no noticeable coercive action to deal with this situation. The message that *tagging* on its own will deal with this situation is foolhardy.

Fact 23: A Division (and I'm not referring to the notorious Division 6, 'tal-kastig') locks up prisoners for 16 hours a day without anything for the prisoners to do in the cells, thus risking insanity.

Fact 24: Prisoners are moved around from one Division to another without a clear protocol except what allegedly appears to be an attempt to break people down.

Fact 25: People are placed in Division 6 as a form of intake (later on Covid-19 was the excuse) which was a known fact that it just intended to instill a culture of fear.

Fact 26: NGOs are only getting excess to prison now, almost two years after this support was cut off for no understandable reason.

Fact 27: Inmates are not allowed to study after being promised to do so and for no explainable reason.

Fact 28: It has taken prison activist Peppi Azzopardi years to have his contact number reinstated and made available for the inmates after it had been blocked.

Fact 29: Immigrants who were sent to prison following riots were hosed down and 'stacked' in cells in large groups.

Fact 30: It seems that the recently introduced prison uniforms will be changed due to the lack of quality. Wasted resources?

Fact 31: It has been alleged that some inmates are not allowed to use fans notwithstanding the air circulation and general conditions in cells are appalling.

Fact 32: Several cells lack proper sanitary conditions.

Fact 33: The number of drug rehabilitation programs are incomparable with the number of people nursing this problem.

Fact 34: One narrative after another of families speaking about the atrocities that members of their family go through.

Fact 35: Around 50 entities working in the social sector asked via a petition for a 'humane prison'.

Fact 36: The training of prison officials does not seem to be happening as per CHAPTER 559 of the ACADEMY FOR DISCIPLINED FORCES ACT.

Fact 37: The military model of management is an outdated and passé model. A number of ideas were presented by the undersigned and Peppi Azzopardi to propose new ways of taking this institution to a new level.

Fact 38: Notwithstanding a journalist has been assassinated, Director Colonel is quoted as saying that; "[the] Greatest Danger Faced By Maltese Journalists Is Tripping Over A Step".

Fact 39: Alleged illegal culling of pigeons by Director Colonel is being investigated by the Police.

Fact 40: The Director Colonel had a notice promoting 'fear' as a fundamental component of the Prison ethos, once again an antiquated operational model.

Fact 41: Prison Committees and Boards are not working - Minister admits this by claiming he will be proposing reforms.

Fact 42: Malta's prison suicide rate is amongst the highest.

Fact 43: The use of a restraint chair exists and lies at a prominent place in the prison. The Minister denied this at first but had to retract his position and admit to its use. It has been reported that medical doctors in prison advice on the use of the restraint chair. Baffling. This merits an Inquiry.

If you need emotional support, you can call Richmond Malta's helpline on 1770 or 179. In case of an emergency, you can call Mater Dei Hospital's Crisis Intervention Service on 2545 3950. Alternatively, type OLLI.Chat on your desktop, mobile or tablet browser to chat with a professional 24/7.