



International Centre for Prison Studies

ICPS NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the nineteenth edition of the ICPS News Digest, a selection of news items from around the world on prison and the use of imprisonment. We aim in the Digest to cover all regions and include new developments in policy and practice, as well as information from official and intergovernmental bodies. The Digest is produced bi-monthly and this issue covers the period from 1 January to 28 February 2014. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

The [Australian](#) prison system is almost at capacity, and exceeds capacity in some states, according to a report released by the Productivity Commission. Excluding periodic detainees – those imprisoned for certain days of the week – there was an increase of three percent in the average number of people in prison each day in 2012-13 to 30,082. Of those, 8,259 were Indigenous Australians. Indigenous people make up around two percent of Australia's population but provide 27.5 percent of the prison population. Prisoners in Victoria, [Australia](#), have started to move into shipping containers as part of the state government's plans to expand the prison system to alleviate overcrowding in the state's prisons, while in [New South Wales](#) the Premier has announced that more jails will be built to cope with a large increase of prisoners expected as the result of new mandatory minimum sentences.

The implementation of a controversial reform to [Colombia's](#) Penal Code means that between 7,000 – 9,000 prisoners could be freed on parole or house arrest, or have their sentences reduced. The state of the country's overcrowded prisons has been at crisis level for years, with the overpopulation becoming one of the main topics pressuring Congress to approve the vastly more flexible code last year with the support of the President. Changes to the code include the extension of the maximum sentence for which house arrest could be granted to eight years. Those with sentences of up to four years could receive a reduction or

cancellation of their sentence, while those who have completed three fifths of their sentence and stayed within the law could receive the option of leaving prison on probation.

The [Croatian](#) Justice Minister has reported that the situation in the country's prisons has improved thanks to the introduction of the probation system. 3,000 people are currently on probation in the country, leading to a reduction in those held in overcrowded prisons.

Overcrowding at Her Majesty's Prison in the Federation of [St Kitts and Nevis](#) has been a major concern for a number of years. In order to reduce overcrowding the Attorney General has announced plans to introduce a Parole Act which will apply to those imprisoned for non-violent offences and those who are considered to be rehabilitated but have not yet completed their sentence. Those released on parole will be monitored and the Ministry of Justice is now considering the systems that would need to be put in place to allow the Act to be rolled out.

[Romanian](#) prison authorities say some 400 prisoners could be in line for parole or more lenient sentences under a revised criminal code. The National Penitentiaries Administration said that 122 prisoners were released as soon as the new code became law, with a further 176 being eligible for a reduction in their sentence. Other cases are being analysed.

[Italy's](#) Senate has given final approval to a new law aimed at reducing the overcrowding in the country's prison system by releasing some prisoners early. [Italy's](#) constitutional court has also struck down a drug law that tripled sentences for selling, cultivating or possessing cannabis and which has been blamed for causing prison overcrowding.

Twenty eight of [Ghana's](#) 43 prisons are overcrowded by between 8 and 167 percent, which is causing concern as overcrowding is a major contributing factor in the spread of communicable diseases among prisoners. The overcrowding has led to a lack of sleeping space, poor ventilation, poor sanitary conditions and inadequate food.

A new Urban Institute report details the experiences of 17 [US](#) states participating in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI). The report examines the factors driving prison growth and how state policymakers are responding to this growth. Common problems include lengthy sentences, high parole and probation revocation rates, and inefficient supervision and re-entry services for released prisoners. States are testing a range of strategies designed to yield better public safety returns on their corrections spending. In South Carolina, for instance, corrections spending rose 500 percent over the past 25 years, and its prison population tripled. Increased housing of nonviolent offenders, a growing number of returning parolees and probationers, and declining use of parole drove this growth. The state responded with targeted reforms, such as strengthening supervision and enhancing parole release decision making. Since implementing the reforms, the state has saved more than \$7 million and prevented the return of 1,000 probationers and parolees to prison. Total projected savings across all 17 states amount to as much as \$4.6 billion.

More than 2,000 prisoners were released early in [Zimbabwe](#) following a Presidential pardon. Among those benefiting from the pardon were women, except those serving life terms or

who have been sentenced to death, juveniles under the age of 18, terminally ill prisoners and those aged 70 or over.

More than 2,000 prisoners were released in [Myanmar](#) to mark the country's 66th Independence Day. Under the presidential pardon, prisoners facing execution had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, while those with a sentence of more than 40 years were told their sentence would be fixed at 40 years.

Double bunking of federal prisoners in cells designed for one person, a practice which has been condemned by the Correctional Investigator, will continue across [Canada](#) over the next five years, according to briefing documents prepared for the Public Safety Minister. Corrections officials project that the federal prison population – which is currently around 15,000 – will grow by about 1,050 by 2018, which the officials say will necessitate the “temporary use of double bunking” as well as inter-regional transfers of prisoners. Correctional Service Canada is also building new living units within existing prisons which is hopes will add more than 2,700 spaces.

A new report by the International Drug Policy Consortium has found that harsh drug laws are driving a surge in the number of women imprisoned in [Latin America](#). Between 2006 and 2011 the female prison population in the region almost doubled, increasing from 40,000 to more than 74,000 prisoners. The vast majority are in prison for drug related offences, usually low level drug trafficking offences. The report calls for more proportionate penalties for drug offences, particularly for vulnerable groups, more prevention and income generating programmes to be established and a special focus to be put on alternatives to prison for those convicted of low-level, non-violent offences.

More than 900 foreign citizens are currently imprisoned in [Nepal](#), according to the Department of Prison Management which is struggling to manage the jails which are overcrowded and in a dilapidated state. The largest number of jailed foreigners includes Indian citizens, followed by Bhutanese and Bangladeshis. Most of the foreign prisoners are serving sentences for drug smuggling. The Director General of the DoPM says that the increasing number of foreign prisoners has added to the overcrowding problem, saying the jails have already double and sometimes four times more prisoners than they can accommodate.

Health

Prisoners with the most acute mental illness are being locked up in prolonged isolation and unkempt, chaotic and “grossly inadequate” conditions, two years after the United Nations called on [Canada](#) to end solitary confinement for prisoners with mental disorders. Documents obtained by the John Howard Society of Canada show that the Correctional Investigator raised concern about the isolation, lack of programming and gross neglect of maintenance and hygiene at Ontario's Millhaven Institution to which prisoners with schizophrenia, major depression and other mental health issues were transferred after the closure of the Regional Treatment Centre. The Correctional Services Commissioner said that steps were being taken to ensure consistent and quality levels of care for mentally ill prisoners.

Also in [Canada](#), the Correctional Investigator has reported that prisoners may be dying needlessly in federal prisons because authorities aren't doing enough to track and prevent deaths on their watch. His report concludes that an untold number of the roughly 35 supposed "natural cause" deaths that occur each year in federal prisons could have been avoided with proper health care and improved tracking of incidents. He recommended that all sudden or unexpected fatalities should be subject to a full national board of investigation, led by a doctor, within 15 working days. The [Canadian](#) Correctional Investigator has also called for a resumption of meetings to discuss deaths in custody and ways to prevent them, as well as the formation of a national advisory body to help identify trends and suggest further research into deaths in prisons.

Up to 180 prisoners – including patients with cancer who are HIV positive or suffering from kidney problems – went on hunger strike to highlight the deplorable conditions at the hospital wing of [Greece's](#) Korydallos prison. A social media campaign launched on behalf of the prisoners has spurred the government into promising to provide more staff to the unit and to offer early release to particular categories of prisoners.

In the [US](#) the California Health Care Facility in Stockton has been ordered to stop admitting prisoners due to unsanitary conditions and medical malpractice — leading to one man's death and an outbreak of scabies. The facility, specifically designed as a premier institution for "patient-inmates" allowed prisoners to languish in their faeces for extended periods of time, provided broken wheelchairs, and ignored patient requests for medical assistance. Inspectors, who were court-appointed to investigate the facility early last year, identified several other examples of patient mistreatment. "A shortage of towels forced prisoners to dry off with dirty socks, a shortage of soap halted showers for some inmates, and incontinent men were put into diapers and received catheters that did not fit, causing them to soil their clothes and beds". Nurses did not respond when called, as was the case when a bleeding man's request for help went ignored. Moreover, prisoners were often expected to assist one another, as was the case when "one man in a wheelchair with emphysema" was told to transport another inmate confined to a wheelchair.

In the last few months 14 juveniles and three adults attempted to take their own lives whilst in custody in [Jamaica](#). The Department of Correctional Services said it recognised the need to build capacity to manage the psycho-social needs of prisoners and said the last two intakes of correctional officers had been trained to deal with those at risk of suicide or self harm.

Eleven people committed suicide in [Norwegian](#) prisons in 2013, twice as many as in 2012. The Correctional Services is concerned about the increase and has announced that an investigation into suicide in prisons will take place in the spring. From 2000 to 2012 between two and seven cases of suicide in prisons were registered each year, and since 1980 more than 80 people have taken their own lives in Norwegian prisons.

In [Israel](#) the Knesset State Control Committee chairman has said that families of prisoners who die while imprisoned should be informed of the causes of death. He said currently the Prisons Service gives families minimal information about the circumstances of their

relative's death. He also said the quality of medical treatment in prisons should be transparent and a matter for public discussion.

More than 22,000 prisoners at Pollsmoor prison in [South Africa](#) have been screened for tuberculosis in an attempt to contain the spread of the epidemic. With an average of 500,000 infections a year South Africa has the third highest TB infection rate in the world. The number of prisoners infected with TB is estimated at 4,500 per 100,000 of the population. The World Health Organisation considers 250 cases per 100,000 an epidemic.

A first of its kind study in the [US](#) found that prisoners held in New York City jails sent to solitary confinement are nearly seven times more likely to try to hurt or kill themselves than those never assigned to it. The peer reviewed study, published in the American Journal of Public Health, provides empirical evidence of a strong association between self harm and solitary confinement. The study examined 244,699 cases in the city's jail system between January 2010 and January 2013 and found that there were 2,182 acts of self-harm, 103 of them potentially fatal. While 7.3 percent of incarcerations included a stint in solitary confinement, 53.3 percent of self-harm acts — and 45 percent of potentially fatal ones — happened there, the research revealed. [New York State](#) has subsequently announced sweeping reforms intended to curtail the use of solitary confinement, including prohibiting its use in disciplining prisoners under the age of 18 and for pregnant women, and limiting the punishment to 30 days for those who are developmentally disabled.

Prisoners at Luzira Women's Prison in [Uganda](#) no longer have to walk to the prison staff clinic a kilometre away to give birth. Family of Africa, a non-governmental organisation, in conjunction with the Government, has constructed a maternity unit to cater for pregnant prisoners. The unit, which is adjacent to the Women's Prison, has a labour ward, doctor's room, incubation room for premature babies, a laboratory prescription room, bathrooms and a ward that can accommodate 30 mothers. The Health Ministry has provided drugsm three delivery beds including one for mothers with disabilities, sterilisers and washing machines.

[Singapore](#) Prison Service, one of the few correctional institutions in the world to have implemented a complete end-to-end Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system, has won the 'Service Innovation' category at the FutureGov awards. The EMR system captures comprehensive medical information, enables automation of work processed with a medicine packing and medicine dispensation through handheld devices, and enables the prison to provide high quality medical care to prisoners in an efficient and effective way with proper accountability at various levels.

Treatment of prisoners

[Bahrain](#)'s main opposition party has called on human rights organisations to take immediate action on Bahraini political prisoners who are on hunger strike. Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society urged the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and the International Committee of the Red Cross to look into the situation at the Dry Dock prison where around 500 prisoners are on hunger strike in protest against their mistreatment. The prisoners say they are subjected to torture during interrogation.

Around 120 prisoners in [Jordan](#) went on a hunger strike to protest about their treatment. The strike began after they said prison authorities did not meet their demands for better access to lawyers, family members, speedier trials and an end to alleged mistreatment and torture during interrogation. Police sources confirmed that the prisoners had gone on hunger strike but denied any systematic violations of prisoners' rights.

Some 1,000 prisoners in [Georgia](#)'s western Imereti Province launched a hunger strike, protesting about what they describe as abusive prison conditions. Also in [Georgia](#), at least 17 prisoners from Geguti penitentiary were hospitalised with self-inflicted stab wounds. A further 800 prisoners were on hunger strike protesting against alleged abuse by prison guards and demanding proper medical treatment. The Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance has denied the allegations of mistreatment, claiming that "mafia dons" were behind the hunger strike.

A group of [Egyptian](#) human rights organisations have called for an immediate and independent investigation into the alleged practice of "savage" torture and sexual assault reported by detainees arrested during the third anniversary of the 2011 revolution. All 79 of the detainees being held at the Abu Za'abal prison have reported being tortured. Their allegations including claiming they have been sexually assaulted or electrocuted. Female prisoners held at Al-Qanatar prison claim to have been subjected to vaginal examinations without their consent.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers has called for an independent probe into allegations of torture in [United Arab Emirates](#) prisons, which she was not allowed to visit during a fact finding mission. The Rapporteur said she had received credible information and evidence of detainees being tortured and /or subjected to ill treatment including being put in "electric chairs." She also received information that detainees are arrested without warrant, blindfolded, taken to unknown places and held incommunicado, sometimes for months.

[Iraqi](#) authorities are detaining thousands of women illegally and subjecting many to torture and ill-treatment, including the threat of sexual abuse, according to a Human Rights Watch report. Many women were detained for months or even years without seeing a judge and security forces often questioned them about their male relatives' activities rather than crimes they themselves were believed to have committed. In custody women described being kicked, slapped, hung upside down and beaten on the soles of their feet, given electric shocks, threatened with sexual assault during interrogation and even raped in front of their relatives and children. A spokesman for Iraq's Human Rights Ministry said the reports were "over-exaggerated" but acknowledged that "we have some limited illegal behaviours which were practised by security forces against women prisoners" which it said had been identified by the ministry's own teams.

Allegations of sexual abuse in [US](#) prisons are increasing, and correctional staff are responsible for half of reported incidents, according to a new Department of Justice Study. The report found that between 2009 and 2011 administrators reported about 25,000 allegations of sexual victimisation in prisons, jails and other adult correctional facilities. Prison staff were allegedly responsible for 49 percent of reported incidents. Prosecution for

crimes committed by staff are extremely rare. Over three quarters of staff responsible for sexual misconduct were allowed to resign before an investigation concluded or were fired. Around 45 percent were referred for prosecution but only one percent of perpetrators were convicted. The [US](#) government has warned states they may lose some federal funding if they don't take steps to detect and reduce sexual assaults of prisoners.

Rights organisations in [Nigeria](#) allege that conditions in the prisons are appalling and say they are investigating allegations of overcrowding, beatings and killings. Amnesty International says hundreds of people died from neglect or mistreatment in the country's prisons in 2013. The Nigerian government says it is committed to prison reform as part of the President's "transformation agenda" but some analysts say there's no money for it as of the nearly \$290 million allocated for prisons in the 2014 budget only five percent will go to new programmes and improvements. The rest will be spent on salaries and maintenance.

The President of [Cyprus](#) has pledged a radical overhaul of Nicosia Central prison, the only prison in the country. His announcement comes after a third suicide in the prison in a year, and reports of the gang rape of a young foreign prisoner. In August a riot left three prisoners in intensive care and at least three prison officers were injured. Chronic overcrowding at the prison coupled with dilapidated buildings has been a source of continuous concern for the justice ministry.

In the [US](#), prison guards working at the death row prison in Livingston, Texas, are asking the state to make conditions more humane for the almost 300 prisoners and prevent daily threats to staff safety. Staff leaders say years of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation literally drive prisoners insane and make them more likely to wound the guards, riot or attempt to escape. The guards want the prisoners to be able to share two to a cell and use an iPad or similar computer tablet to watch television on a secure internal network as incentives for good behaviour.

Dozens of newly recruited prison staff in the Darfur region of [Sudan](#) have undertaken training on a human rights approach to prison management and basic prison duties. The training, which has been organised by the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur in collaboration with the UN Development Programme and the North Darfur Prisons Administration, is designed to furnish participants with practical knowledge so they can contribute to the rehabilitation of the prisoners. Staff will learn about the standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners, key system management and control mechanisms and prison property management.

The Regional Coordinator of Prison Fellowship has disclosed that his institution will intensively begin monitoring prison conditions in three [Liberian](#) counties. PF will make regular visits to prisons in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties and make recommendation to the Government, with the aim of improving conditions in the prisons which have been described as "deplorable."

The Prosecutor General's office in [Egypt](#) reported that unannounced inspections had been carried out at seven prisons. The inspections are the beginning of a larger inspection programme which will include prisons throughout the country.

Prison violence

At least two prisoners were killed and eight others injured during a riot in Sao Jaoa prison in the [Brazilian](#) state of Pernambuco. The riot began when prisoners protested against conditions in the prison, mistreatment and the poor quality of food. 1,870 prisoners are held in the prison which has capacity of 650.

Several prisoners at Zahle prison in [Lebanon](#) set fire to one of the wings of the prison to protest their living conditions and alleged abuse by an officer. This was not the first riot at the prison and overcrowded jails across the country witness frequent protests as prisoners living in poor conditions demand better treatment.

Ten prisoners died and dozens were injured at Modelo prison in [Colombia](#) when prisoners set fire to mattresses after prison staff used tear gas to break up a fight between rival gangs. Prison authorities said the overcrowding at the prison, which holds around 1,200 prisoners in a building designed for 275, led to the high casualty rate as prisoners could not evacuate quickly enough. A further six prisoners subsequently [died](#) in hospital.

The [Mexican](#) army took control of a prison in the south west of the country after a gunfight left nine people dead. Prosecutors said six gunmen entered the prison posing as public officials delivering a prisoner. Once inside they opened fire on a group of prisoners, killing four of them before the guards returned fire killing five of the gunmen. The motive for the killings is not known but rivalries between drug gangs have often been played out in prisons.

506 people were killed in [Venezuelan](#) prisons in 2013, down by 14 percent from 591 in 2012, according to the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP). The head of the OVP said as many as 6,163 prisoners have been murdered and 16,208 injured since 1999.

Rights groups across [Turkey](#) are calling for the closure of five juvenile jails, after an incident where 50 guards allegedly attacked child detainees at the Sincan prison with metal objects, pepper gas and water guns. The trouble reportedly began after a sick child could not get out of bed during a roll call. The incident led to 22 human rights and children's groups unifying under "The Initiative to Close Down Children's Prisons." The head of the initiative said Turkey is violating international treaties by subjecting child prisoners to degrading treatment and called for a new structure to be established based on alternative measures to imprisonment.

Developments in rehabilitation

A new child-friendly visitor's area, complete with books and toys and designed to cut down on reoffending, has opened at Invercargill Prison in [New Zealand](#). The Department of Corrections believes that strengthening relationships and parenting skills can play a vital part in a successful return to the community. There are an estimated 20,000 children in New Zealand with at least one parent in prison.

Parolees from prisons in the Western Cape of [South Africa](#) have received work tools such as sewing machines, welding and car wash kits to assist them in starting their own businesses. The donations are part of a programme by the Department of Correctional Services together with the NGO New Life After Prison which aims to reduce the number of released prisoners who return to prison. The programme started in 2011 and has been rolled out to five regions so far.

The artistic expression of prisoners in the rehabilitation programme at HMP Dodds in [Barbados](#) has found an outlet through the publication of the prison's first calendar which features prisoners' artwork and poetry. Some 4,000 copies of the calendar, entitled 'Promoting Second Chances,' were printed and distributed to prisoners' families and friends and to the company which sponsored the production of the calendar. The calendar was part of the Second Chance Initiative which aims to educate society on the prison's rehabilitative efforts.

The [Malaysian](#) Home Ministry has proposed to fund prison activities from products made by prisoners. The products are made by prisoners who undergo skills training, and include songket cloth, batik, snacks and handicrafts. The Home Minister reported that only 0.34 percent of the 15,183 prisoners who had undergone rehabilitation programmes returned to prison, and that 90 percent of prisoners who had completed the programmes had secured jobs on release.

The [South African](#) Department of Correctional Services is aiming towards self-sufficiency through full utilisation of its 40,000 hectares of correctional centre farm land, with the Correctional Services Minister announcing that more prisoners would be trained in agricultural production. Over the past two years, almost 30 million kilogrammes of vegetables, fruit and meat were produced by prisoners at correctional centre farms and abattoirs, and over five million loaves of bread were produced at its six bakeries. Prisoners have also built and renovated several houses and schools in disadvantaged areas, and there are also production workshops in the prisons including ten wood workshops, ten steel workshops, 19 textile workshops, a shoe factory and three sanitary towel units.

The [New Zealand](#) Corrections Department expects that all eligible participants in three working prisons will be working 40 hours a week by June. The Corrections Minister says the programme gives prisoners structured education, skills training and work experience which supports rehabilitation and reduces the likelihood of the prisoners returning to prison after release. Among the work the prisoners are doing is refurnishing earthquake damaged homes, mobility dog training and farms and trade training.

Officials at HMP Fox Hill, the only prison in the [Bahamas](#), have unveiled a new baseball facility at the prison. The construction of the baseball diamond is the first phase of a comprehensive plan that will result in the construction of a mini sporting complex at the prison that will also include facilities for track and field, basketball, tennis and other sports. The Superintendent of the prison said the construction of the complex is part of the Government's move towards the prison serving as a correctional facility rather than a penal institution, and that it will be also for greater interaction between the prison, its staff and prisoners and members of the public.

Team sports are being played in many [Argentinean](#) prisons as a result of an agreement between the Argentine Justice Ministry and the government's Sports Secretariat. Several prisons have their own football teams and play in regional leagues where the players have the chance to be spotted by local clubs with the possibility of being signed up on release from prison. Rugby in prisons is also increasing, with some 400 prisoners playing the game in 18 prisons, and a women's hockey team has been formed in one prison which is coached by a former Argentine international player.

Prisoners at Banteay Meanchey Provincial Prison in [Cambodia](#) have joined forces with prison officials to pay for the construction of the first Buddhist worship hall in a Cambodian prison. The 800 prisoners contributed a minimum of 500 riel each to help construct the facility fitted out with Buddhist statues to allow them to seek peace and enhance their opportunity for rehabilitation.

State level spending on prison education programmes in the [US](#) declined sharply during the economic downturn, with the sharpest drop occurring in states that imprison the most people, according to a new study by the RAND Corporation. While the drop appears to have resulted from budget cuts the report suggest that the curtailment of prison education could increase prison system costs in the longer term. A meta-analysis included in the report which synthesises findings from multiple studies about the effectiveness of correctional education programmes found that, on average, prisoners who participated in education programmes had a 13 percentage point reduction in their probability of returning to prison. Researchers also found that a \$1 investment in education programmes reduced imprisonment costs by \$5 during the first three years post release.

Sentencing and the law

Higher courts in Victoria, [Australia](#) favoured using fines and imprisonment as suspended sentences began to be abolished last year, according to the Sentencing Advisory Council. The state government began to phase out suspended sentences in 2012, and also introduced community corrections orders as a sentencing option. The Council's report showed that as suspended sentences began to be phased out in 2012 judges tended to favour the community orders over imprisonment, which suggested they saw them as a "credible alternative to suspended sentences." However in 2013 judges reversed this trend, imprisoning and fining more people and issuing fewer community corrections orders. The study said it was unclear why this was happening but suggested it might reflect a "change in attitude among judges to the order."

In [Ireland](#) new legislation has been introduced which aims to reduce the number of people sent to prison for minor offences. The Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill will modernise the law around community service as a punishment and is intended to bring the probation service into the 21st century. The Bill will also abolish the court poor box and replace it with a reparation fund which will be used to fund victim support services. The poor box is used by judges in criminal prosecutions heard in the lower courts. Instead of a conviction or a statutory fine the judge can order the defendant to place a donation in the court poor box which is then paid to a charity nominated by the judge.

In [Singapore](#) the Parliament has passed changes to the Prisons Act that will introduce a conditional remission system and a Mandatory Aftercare System (MAS). The MAS is a structured two year regime that provides community support and counselling as well as tighter supervision for former prisoners who need more help reintegrating into society. Conditional remission imposes conditions on prisoners who are granted remission for good conduct and behaviour in prison. Released prisoners who breach the conditions could be sent back to prison.

[Kazakhstan](#) is planning to punish most minor and moderate non-fatal crimes with fines rather than imprisonment according to the First Deputy Prosecutor. A draft revision to the Criminal Code, currently being debated in the lower house of parliament, would make more than 50 percent of such crimes punishable by fines and would increase fines by 57 percent on average.

In [Australia](#) the UN has been asked to intervene in an overhaul of juvenile crime laws in Queensland under which young offenders' names would be published, detention would no longer be seen as a last resort and 17 year olds would be moved into adult jails. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and the Human Rights Law Centre say the laws will impact particularly harshly on Indigenous children and the two organisations have written to the UN asking it to investigate and take action if necessary as they consider that the proposed laws are likely to violate a number of Australia's human rights obligations.

The [Japanese](#) Cabinet has approved a bill to raise the maximum jail term for under 18 year olds convicted of an offence from 15 years to 20. The government aims to win parliamentary approval for the bill to revise the Juvenile Law in the face of calls from crime victims to make punishments for juveniles closer to those for adults. Academics and lawyers have voiced criticism that the move goes against the spirit of the law which places priority on rehabilitating juveniles.

A prominent judicial official in the violence-torn [Central African Republic](#) has said that the country lacks a functioning justice system, citing lack of security for courts and jails. He said that the ongoing sectarian violence meant that court staff feared they could be attacked during proceedings, and that the prisons would need to be made more secure before the justice system could start to work again. He also said that judicial employees had not received their salaries for the last five months.

The [Italian](#) Justice Minister has admitted that the country's judicial system was suffering despite the good work of the magistrates. The minister said that Italy's courts were faced with over eight million outstanding cases in June 2013 - 5.2 million civil cases and almost 3.5 million criminal ones.

In [South Africa](#) a senior ANC member has called for a policy change that could result in awaiting-trial prisoners unable to pay bail of R1000 or less being released from prison. He also suggested that remand prisoners who could not give a "reliable" address, such as people living in informal settlements, be released. The proposal has drawn support from opposition parties and civil society groups who say the current system had created an

“economic apartheid” where the poor were trapped in prison for minor offences because they could not afford to pay a small bail cost while rich people on serious charges were able to get released on bail, a situation which was exacerbating the serious overcrowding in the country’s prisons.

A group of NGOs has criticised provisions in [Bulgaria’s](#) Penal Code that would increase penalties for small scale drug possession and cause a “mass incarceration crisis” in the country. Bulgaria has some of the toughest drug laws in Europe. In 1989 only 11 people were imprisoned for drug offences, rising to 723 in 2004 and 1,155 in 2010. Bulgarian drug law currently levies a fine of up to 500 Euro for possession of a small amount of drugs. However the new bill imposes mandatory imprisonment for cases of possession of any amount of an illegal drug, making no distinction between people who use or are dependent on drugs and those who are selling or producing drugs for a profit. The new bill also does not offer the option of drug treatment as an alternative to punishment.

[India’s](#) Supreme Court has commuted the sentences of 15 death row prisoners to life imprisonment on the grounds of delay. The prisoners had challenged their death sentences because of the time taken by the president to answer their mercy petitions. Reports say the judgment will affect more than 400 prisoners who are currently on death row in India.

The [Zambian](#) government says it is in the process of reviewing the Prisons Act to ensure it meets international standards. One of the provisions which the Home Affairs Minister says should be implemented is the section that says that if a child goes to prison with their mother, the child’s costs should be covered by the state. Currently if a child is imprisoned with its mother no food rations are provided for them.

Prison policy

The [Russian](#) prison service has announced that it is creating a trading house to sell products made by prisoners. The head of the prison service’s economic and financial department said prisoners produce over 100,000 kinds of goods, ranging from uniforms and shoes to kitchenware and furniture. The use of jail labour has caused controversy in light of allegations that prisoners are forced to work unreasonably long hours for low wages, a claim which was also made by a Pussy Riot band member who served almost two years in a labour camp and says she was forced to spend 17 hours a day sewing police uniforms for about 30 roubles (\$1) a month.

Prison authorities in New South Wales, [Australia](#), will be able to deduct some of what prisoners earn in work release programmes to pay for their imprisonment, under laws introduced by the Attorney General. The laws will only affect about 100 minimum security prisoners a year who go on work release for external companies.

Prisoners in the [Netherlands](#) may soon have to pay for their cell accommodation, under plans announced by the Deputy Justice Minister. Prison time costs the Dutch government around 250 Euros per prisoner per day. If passed by the two houses of parliament, convicted prisoners will pay a suggested flat rate of 16 Euros per day for a maximum of two years. If approved it will become law on 1st January 2015. A separate bill that would require

prisoners to contribute to the costs of the investigation that led to their conviction is also under consideration. The two bills would generate 65 million Euros a year for the prison system.

The [US](#) Attorney General has urged states to restore voting rights to former prisoners; an issue he said primarily affects African Americans. Eleven states continue to restrict voting rights after a person has served a prison sentence and is no longer on probation or parole, affecting an estimated 5.8 million people.

The [Swedish](#) Justice Minister has rejected a proposal from Norway to rent space in Swedish prisons for its prisoners. The request came as Norway struggles with a shortage of cells that police complain has forced them to release people back onto the streets. The Justice Minister said there were a number of complicated legal aspects that prevented her from agreeing to the proposal, but said she is open to exploring some sort of arrangement in future where the two countries could help one another.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and Her Majesty's Prisons in the [Bahamas](#) which aims to facilitate the modernisation of the Bahamian penal system by bringing it in line with international conventions and best practices. Under the MoU the CSC will help the Bahamian prison service to improve its policies, technology, security intelligence, correctional programmes, facility planning, research and evaluation, data gathering, training and leadership development.

The [Irish](#) Ministry of Justice has signed the building contract for a new prison in Cork which is based on double occupancy of cells. Campaigners have criticised the move saying that this is a "retrograde step" and in breach of international best practice, and is a missed opportunity to put in place truly modern prison facilities.

The governor of the [US](#) state of Idaho says the corrections department will take over operation of the largest privately run prison in the state after more than a decade of mismanagement and other problems at the facility. The Idaho Correctional Institution-Orofino, which is run by Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) has been the subject of multiple lawsuits alleging rampant violence, understaffing, gang activity and contract fraud by CCA.

More than 3,000 correctional officers in [South Africa](#) were charged with misconduct and corruption in the 2012/13 financial year. A total of 251 officials were dismissed and demoted while 2,850 officials were subjected to misconduct and disciplinary proceedings. The Correctional Services Minister has vowed to root out corruption in the department.

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