



International Centre for Prison Studies

ICPS NEWS DIGEST

3rd Edition – May/June 2011

Welcome to the third edition of the ICPS News Digest, a selection of news items from around the world on prison and the use of imprisonment. The articles have mainly been selected for their relevance to current debates in the UK. The Digest will be produced bi-monthly and this issue covers the period from 1 May to 30 June 2011. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

Prison populations

Prison populations continue to rise in many countries of the world. The Justice Minister in [Mali](#) reported that the country's prison population had grown from 341 in 1961, the year that Mali became independent, to 5,041 in 2011. Overcrowding also continues to be a problem, with an official in the Punjab police, [Pakistan](#), informing the State Special Committee on Human Rights that there are over 53,000 prisoners in the province, which has capacity for 21,527 prisoners. In [Lebanon](#) it has been reported that the prisons are operating at double capacity, holding between 5,876 and 7,000 prisoners in a system with a maximum capacity of 3,653.

A report on prison conditions in [Armenia](#) identified overcrowding as the most serious problem facing the country's 5,100 strong prison population, finding during visits that 12, 18 or even 20 prisoners were being held in cells designed for 8 people. When asked how they slept the prisoners replied "we take turns."

Issues continue to be raised about specific sections of prison populations. A report from [Australia](#) showed that the rate of imprisonment for indigenous Australians has jumped by more than 50 per cent in the past decade, increasing from 1,248 per 100,000 adults jailed in 2000 to 1,892 per 100,000 in 2010. There are almost 7,600 indigenous Australians in prisons

nationwide, making up 26 per cent of the prison population despite representing just 2.5 per cent of Australia's total population.

In [Cambodia](#) there are approximately 730 juveniles in the country's prisons. The local rights group Licadho reported that in most provincial prisons juveniles are fully integrated with the adult population, in a system which is "totally incapable of providing for a child's basic needs – education, proper nutrition, medical care and so on. The experience is more likely to harden juveniles than rehabilitate them."

In [Switzerland](#) a study by the Swiss National Science Foundation found that the number of older prisoners, those over the age of 50, doubled between 1984 and 2008. In 2008, 302 people over 50 were in prison – 11.2 per cent of the prison population. Of these, 103 were over the age of 60. The researchers recommended penal institutions take measures to adapt to the situation by setting up accommodation that corresponds to older prisoners' needs.

The [US](#) Supreme Court has upheld an order for California to free thousands of prisoners because of overcrowding. Federal judges had ordered 40,000 prisoners to be released within two years. The state says it has 148,000 prisoners in jails designed for 80,000 people. California appealed to the Supreme Court arguing that the prisoners could pose a risk to public safety but the Court ruled the limit was necessary to remedy the violation of prisoners' constitutional rights. Judges rejected the state's appeal by a 5-4 vote and upheld the 2009 federal court order.

Drugs

In [Canada](#) a study has found that female prisoners who did not participate in a drug treatment programme after their release were ten times more likely to return to prison within one year than other prisoners. Women make up five per cent of the federal prison population, although that number has tripled in the past 20 years. About one-third of them were convicted of drug-related offences.

The rate of positive drug tests in prisons in [Australia](#) has alarmed authorities. In just two months, prisoners at three Victorian jails racked up 130 positive drug tests – almost one for every 14 prisoners – while at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, Victoria's main women's prison, there was one positive drug test for every eight prisoners in just two months.

A new rehabilitation centre for drug addicts among prisoners has been opened in Paldena prison in [Sri Lanka](#). The new centre has facilities for about 500 prisoners. With the opening of the new centre the Prison Department now has the capacity to provide drug rehabilitation for about 2,100 prisoners at once. 40 per cent of the country's 12,000 prisoners are drug addicts.

Treatment of prisoners

The conditions in which prisoners are held, and the treatment they receive in prisons around the world continue to be a source of great concern. In [Ireland](#) a report presented to the UN Committee Against Torture by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Irish Prison Reform Trust raised “real concerns about the safe and humane treatment of prisoners” due to serious overcrowding in some old and dilapidated prisons. It says the prison population has doubled since 1997, totalling 4,541 prisoners on January 25th last. Overcrowding is also causing increased levels of inter-prisoner violence in Irish prisons. Conditions at [Limerick](#) prison were strongly criticised when an inspection found that many areas of the prison were dirty, a number of cell windows were broken and the practice of slopping out continued in two wings of the prison.

In [Lebanon](#) over 2,000 prisoners went on hunger strike demanding a general amnesty. At least 20 of them were hospitalised. [Relatives](#) of the prisoners also staged a sit-in near the Parliament.

The European Court of Human Rights unanimously ruled that [Hungary](#) violated the ban on inhuman and humiliating treatment in the case of Zsigmond Csullog who was held in solitary confinement, with no natural light or separate toilet facilities, kept under solitary video surveillance, forbidden access to any personal belongings and only allowed to meet visitors from a glass covered cabin.

In the [US](#) the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women released a report confirming the rights violations that women face in American prisons and correctional facilities. The report states that “inadequate access to health services in prison and detention facilities is characterized by delays, neglect and mistreatment of inmates and detainees.” The prison rights organisation Justice now described how due to desperate needs for basic necessities such as toilet paper, tampons and soap female prisoners are

forced to acts of prostitution. In at least one prison in [Illinois](#) a clothing shortage means that prisoners are forced to wear the same underwear for several days at a time. The prison in central Illinois issues each prisoner only two pairs of underwear, meaning they must be worn multiple days without washing.

Also in the [US](#) an audit has shown that prisoners in California's youth justice system were subjected to nearly round the clock confinement on hundreds of occasions and had to attend school in closets, showers and storerooms because of staff shortages and rampant violence amongst prisoners.

In [Australia](#) New South Wales Corrective Services has launched a full review of Junee Correctional Centre's housing of female inmates after private prison operator GEO Group stood down five staff at the Centre over allegations they spied on a female prisoner as she undressed.

An independent rights group in [Thailand](#) has started a campaign to improve conditions in the country's prisons. It has issued a report which highlights overcrowding, the use of shackles and the lack of medical care. People have to sleep in tight rows on hard floors. In these sleeping cells each prisoner has an average of one square metre – as opposed to the four to six square metres described as the minimum by the Council of Europe. In the women's prison there are 200 women in a single cell. "If one of them has to get up at night to go to the toilet, they all shift a bit and when she comes back the space is gone and she has to stand up all night."

Conditions at the Kabala prison in [Sierra Leone](#) have deteriorated so much that the safety of prisoners is at risk. The prison has ten cells, five of which are in appalling condition. The prison also does not have any vehicles to transport prisoners so prison officials have to hire commercial vehicles to transport prisoners to court hearings.

Two prisoners in [Kazakhstan](#) have threatened to set fire to themselves after allegedly being beaten by prison guards. [Kazakh](#) officials have also confirmed that a number of HIV-positive prisoners of the maximum security penitentiary in Zarechny staged a protest demanding proper medical treatment for HIV, decent food for prisoners and the lifting of limitations on parcels sent from relatives. Prison officials have denied that security forces were brought in to the prison to deal with the situation.

The [Czech](#) Helsinki Committee has presented its report on the state of human rights in the Czech Republic in 2010. The report described the situation in Czech prisons as critical, with prisons overcrowded by 30 per cent while the number of guards has been decreasing due to austerity measures. Savings have also affected sanitary conditions in prisons, so prisoners can now only shower once a week.

Indian prisoners in CRS No. 5 prison in [Mexico](#) undertook a two day hunger strike to protest abusive behaviour by the prison's warden, as well as extortion and drug trafficking at the facility. The hunger strike ended when an agreement was signed calling for verification that food provided is in good condition, and that prisoners should be provided with 1,000 blankets, 20 mattresses for the conjugal visits area, additional visiting days, the return of confiscated televisions and radios, and expanded recreational facilities.

In Andhra Pradesh, [India](#), 104 prisoners died in 2009-10. The deaths could be attributed to a lack of doctors in jails, indifference of government hospitals to prisoners and a shortage of police escorts. In the whole of India there were 1,527 deaths during 2009-10.

In the [Philippines](#) the House Committee on Justice found that drug money was used to build housing for convicted Chinese druglords in the National Bilibid Prisons. Illegal drug and sex rings were also operating inside the prison. The panel ordered the Justice Secretary to dismantle the huts and her department and the National Bureau of Investigation to find out who among the prison officials had accepted bribes to allow prisoners to be accorded VIP treatment.

Life sentenced prisoners in [Armenia](#) have initiated and drafted a report raising the issues they are facing and suggesting solutions that could improve their living conditions in prison. The report was submitted to a monitoring group and to the Ministry of Justice, and lists a number of issues, from psychological issues that come with life sentence to those related to food, health open air walks, sports, education, medical assistance, everyday routine, communication with the outside world and visits.

In [Hong Kong](#) the Commissioner of Correctional Services has pledged to review prison facilities and cell design in an attempt to prevent more suicides, after an inquest jury ruled

that five prisoners, who died between December 2009 and August 2010 had all hanged themselves with bedsheets.

In [Zambia](#) the organisation Hope for Human Rights has called on the government to treat the Lusaka Central Prison as a disaster and to move in quickly to provide a solution after revelations by prison authorities that they are forced to come up with a sleeping timetable for the prisoners where a group of prisoners is allowed to sleep and later exchange with the other group due to inadequate space.

Two opposition Members of Parliament in [Mauritania](#) have expressed deep concern about the general situation in the country's prisons. The MPs pointed out the overcrowding in Nouakchott's Main Prison, which has an official capacity of 300 but currently houses 1,250 prisoners, the bad sanitary conditions and food, lack of clean water and medical care, shortage of prison staff and the torture of prisoners, among other things.

Prison violence

In [Russia](#) eight former prison guards have been jailed for up to ten years after being found guilty of beating four prisoners to death. The eight were among 14 former guards at Kopeisk Labor Camp No. 1 to be sentenced. One was jailed for nine years and seven received ten year jail terms. The other six received suspended sentences, as did four regional penitentiary system officials found guilty of trying to cover up the crime. In [Kazakhstan](#) seven prison guards have been found guilty of torturing 26 prisoners last year at a prison in northern Kazakhstan. The officers were found guilty of torture, abuse of power and corruption and received prison sentences of between three and a half and five years.

At least 900 prisoners at Ruyigi prison in [Burundi](#), which has a capacity of 300, staged a riot to protest against deteriorating living conditions. The prisoners claimed they had spent a whole week without receiving beans rations, the staple food in the prison.

In [Papua New Guinea](#) 91 prisoners escaped from the Southern Highlands provincial jail after six armed men broke into the compound, stole guns and ammunition and held up two prison guards. A fire in a prison for minors in [Panama](#) injured 15 juvenile prisoners. The fire

began when a group of prisoners entered the pavilion of a rival group which provoked a violent clash.

Violence continues to be a major problem in prisons in Venezuela. On [5 May](#) prisoners at the El Rodeo prison freed the prison director and 14 other hostages ending an eight day stand off over conditions at the prison. The uprising occurred after a prisoner with tuberculosis was taken to another facility where he was not given medical treatment. As part of the agreement under which the hostages were freed six prisoners were taken to hospital to be checked for TB. On [12 June](#) 19 people were left dead and 22 injured following clashes between prisoners from two areas of the prison. Sources reported that relatives of the prisoners were among the victims. On [20 June](#) gunfights between government troops and prisoners erupted again at the prison which was built for around 750 prisoners but had been holding at least 3,600. At [23 June](#) the situation was ongoing, with authorities awaiting word from the prisoners still inside the prison who were considering allowing troops to enter the prison and disarm them.

In [Pakistan](#) seventeen prisoners were injured when Shia and Sunni prisoners clashed over chalking of controversial slogans on the walls of jail barracks. In order to deal with the situation the prison administration convened a jirga to defuse sectarian tension among prisoners instead of taking legal action. The prisoners assured the administration that they would not indulge in wall chalking, which hurt the feelings of the rival sect, and live together peacefully in future.

Developments in rehabilitation

Tihar Jail in [India](#) is giving prisoners vocational training in diverse fields to help them to prepare for a fresh start on release. A variety of goods ranging from crispy potato chips to herbal products are being sold under the TJ's (Tihar Jail) brand, to generate awareness about the positive activities happening inside the prison walls. And now the jail authorities have created a website for people to buy the products made in the jail.

In Penor Prison in Kuantan, [Malaysia](#), a fish breeding centre has been set up. Prisoners who get involved in the project are able to acquire skills and knowledge in freshwater fry cultivation, including artificial sperm and egg retrieval and insemination and hatchery. With

such knowledge they will be better equipped to make a living after being released from prison.

The Kiambu prison farm in [Kenya](#) has made a breakthrough in growing tomatoes and potatoes on the same stem through grafting, potentially saving on input costs and maximising use of small land parcels in densely populated areas. The crossbreed is being called the pomato. Prisoners are learning the grafting technique as part of rehabilitation programmes that they may apply after completing their sentences to sustain themselves economically.

Also in [Kenya](#) former prisoners have appealed to the government to destroy their fingerprint records so they can get jobs. Shimo La Tewa Prison chief Margaret Chuma said the police records continue to paint a negative picture of former prisoners and scares employers. She said the former prisoners should be given a certificate of good conduct to help them find work so they can be assimilated back into society.

In the [Gambia](#) the organisation Prison Fellowship has launched a new project called 'Street Cleaning and Garbage Collection.' The purpose of the project is to seek to engage ex-prisoners, their families, and interested members of the community in a street cleaning and garbage collection project. The deputy mayor of Kanifing Municipal Council commended the project opining that engaging ex-prisoners will help in the reduction of crime in the society.

Prisoners at Labasa Prison in [Fiji](#) have also started a clean-up campaign under the Yellow Ribbon Project. More than 20 prisoners travelled to Savusavu for the campaign where they also completed a bread shop building project and have also been working on a chicken farm.

The [Guyana](#) Prison Service's Sentence Management Board has been launched with the aim of providing a forum to address the training and reintegration of prisoners into society. The Home Affairs Minister said that the Board will assist the prison service in designing training programmes that will match the individual needs of prisoners.

Sentencing and the law

The [Zambian](#) government has welcomed the introduction of community service as a non-custodial sentence to help decongest the country's prisons, while in [Denmark](#) a new deal signed by the government, the Danish People's Party and the Christian Democrats aims to combat crime by doubling the length of prison sentences for convicted burglars and rapists and tripling the length of sentences for convicted criminals with organised crime connections.

Justice on Wheels is a Supreme Court initiative in the [Philippines](#) aimed at improving accessibility to the justice system by poor litigants. Since it was launched two years ago the programme has led to the release of over 5,000 prisoners and the settlement of over 5,000 civil cases nationwide. The programme has five components: jail decongestion programme through court hearings and mediation; jail visitation, medical, dental and legal aid programme; information dissemination for officials; dialogue between Supreme Court officials and judge; and the team building programme for Court employees.

In [South Africa](#) the Justice Department has introduced a new video court and prison link with the aim of dramatically reducing the backlog of cases in Cape Town's courts. Cases involving 85 per cent of detainees transported daily are then postponed and the system is aimed at decreasing the high numbers of detainees transported to and from courts, the risk of prisoners escaping, prisoner in-fighting while in transit, and drugs and weapon smuggling.

In [Sierra Leone](#) a non-profit organisation called AdvocAid provides free services for women in the country's prisons, including offering literacy classes, collecting clothing for the women and building a library for them. It also provides legal education so the women can be more aware of their rights.

The [Bulgarian](#) Parliament has rejected proposed amendments to the Penal Code for the abolition of the life-without-parole sentence, with politicians arguing that it must stay in view of the aggravated crime situation in the country.

The Governor of Colorado, in the [US](#) has signed a new law which requires regular mental health evaluations for prisoners in solitary confinement, and allows prisoners to receive "earned time" for good behaviour after 90 days in solitary confinement. It also restricts the practice of releasing prisoners directly from long-term solitary confinement straight into the

community instead of transitioning to the general prison population. There are currently about 1,400 people in solitary confinement in Colorado.

Also in the [US](#), in California a man serving 68 years for a home invasion robbery is likely to be the first prisoner released from state prison on medical parole, under a controversial law passed last year which aims to save the corrections department millions of dollars in treating and guarding medically incapacitated prisoners. Under the law prisoners are eligible for medical parole only if they are so disabled – paralysed, in comas, hooked up to ventilators – that they no longer pose a credible threat to public safety. Should a parolee's medical condition improve the law requires that they be sent back to prison to finish their sentence.

The [United States](#) Sentencing Commission has voted unanimously to apply retroactively a new law that brings penalties for crack cocaine offences more closely in line with those for powdered cocaine. About 12,000 federal prisoners could now be eligible for reductions, with the average being about three years. However Congress could move to undo the revised policy before it takes effect on 1st November, and even if the new rules remain, federal judges will decide whether to grant reduced sentences to prisoners who apply for them.

Prison policy

Research by the Arizona Department of Corrections in the [US](#) has shown the popularly held opinion that private prisons save money is incorrect, and that data suggests that privately operated prisons cost more to operate than state prisons, even though they often steer clear of the sickest, costliest prisoners.

A parliamentary committee in [South Africa](#) has also questioned whether the government's plan to build four new prisons through public-private partnerships is the most cost effective is of doing the job, raising concerns about tying the state into a contract for 25 years and privatising a function that should remain under state control.

In [Bermuda](#) the National Security Minister is making preliminary investigations into the possibility of sending convicted gangsters to serve their time in prisons in the UK and other Commonwealth countries in an attempt to break up Bermuda's gangs and ease friction between gang members in the local prison system.

The President of [Sri Lanka](#) has issued a general amnesty to 2,600 prisoners to mark the 2,600th Sri Sambuddhathwa Jayanthiya. The majority of those released were in prison for being unable to pay fines imposed on them by the courts and those above 65 years of age who were serving prison terms for minor offences. Also in [Sri Lanka](#) the Minister of Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms has directed officials to change the policy of mentioning the place of birth as the prison on the birth certificates of the babies born to female prisoners.

The Director General of the [Irish](#) Prison Service has said that it is necessary to keep some prisoners locked up for 23 hours a day for their own protection, stating that there are currently 900 prisoners on protection, a third of whom had to be kept in their cells almost all of the time for their own safety.

The [French](#) Minister of Justice has announced plans to build 25 new prisons to cope with a surge in the number of prisoners. Another seven prisons will be extended and 15 facilities that were due to be shut down will be kept open. The aim is to give France a prison capacity of 70,000 by 2018. Currently the capacity is 56,500 but the prison population stands at over 64,000.

In South [Australia](#) a trial is underway whereby refurbished shipping containers are used as prison cells. The 12 metre containers comprise six single cells with prison fittings, and if successful the scheme will be extended to Mt Gambier prison and the Adelaide Women's Prison and would save up to 40 per cent on traditional cell costs.

In [Colombia](#) the prison authority has built a separate ward in La Picota prison specifically for public officials implicated in public sector corruption scandals.

The Justice Minister in [Mozambique](#) has announced that over the next four years the government hopes to achieve a reduction of at least 30 percent in the costs of the country's prisons. The Minister called for good quality management of the prisons, for prisoners to grow their own food and for better use of prison labour through the establishment of

partnerships with public and private bodies in order to guarantee the use of prisoners in large scale agricultural and livestock production. The most significant way to reduce costs is through a reduction in the number of prisoners, and a draft bill on alternatives to prison is due to be submitted to the Council of Ministers in July.

Under new rules that are due to come in at the end of the year, prisoners in the [Netherlands](#) will be promoted or degraded depending on their behaviour. Good behaviour will earn them additional freedom of movement or extra training, while those who are jailed for a fourth or fifth time will automatically be placed under the toughest regime.

Prison Service officials in [Kenya](#) have completed two learning visits on how private prisons operate in South Africa and Britain as the country looks to ease congestion and improve its prisons. Kenya's prison population is 49,000 but the official capacity is 22,000. The senior deputy Commissioner of prisons explained that the option of private prisons has been explored and accepted. Private security company G4S has visited the country and expressed an interest in partnering with the government to manage some of the prison services.

[New Zealand's](#) first private prison has begun housing prisoners, but concern has been expressed about staffing levels. Mt Eden prison will be run by British company Serco for at least the next six years, but the company's contract does not stipulate minimum staffing levels. The Corrections Association say that the approximately 960 prisoners were guarded by 427 prison staff under public management but that number has dropped to 200 under private management. Serco has rejected the figures but has refused to say exactly how many staff it has for reasons of security and commercial sensitivity.

In Victoria, [Australia](#) the Community and Public Sector Union, which represents prison guards, has warned that prisoners are more likely to commit rape after the decision to provide free condoms.

In [Iran](#) a member of the mullah's Assembly of Experts has insisted on the regime's punishments of limb amputations, saying "Human beings committed a grave evil mistake by establishing prisons." He said the regime's judicial system should be changed by placing less emphasis on prison sentences and increasing more draconian punishments. He described lashing and torture as compassion and said "A person who steals from a family must be sentenced to nothing but hand amputation, and this will prevent further similar crimes."

The [European Commission](#) has published its Green Paper and launched a public consultation to explore more closely the links between detention issues and mutual trust in the EU's area of justice.

Prison population rates per 100,000 of the national population in selected jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Prison population rate	Change since 1 May 2011
United States of America	743	-
Russian Federation	568	-6
South Africa	316	-3
Brazil	253	-
New Zealand	199	-4
Spain	152	-1
England and Wales	152	-1
Scotland	152	+5

Australia	133	-
China	122	+2
Canada	117	-
Portugal	114	+2
France	102	-
Republic of Ireland	99	-
Netherlands	94	-
Germany	85	-
Northern Ireland	93	+4
Sweden	78	-
Denmark	74	+3
Norway	73	+2

Finland	59	-1
Japan	58	-1
India	32	-

These statistics were taken from World Prison Brief Online at 5 July 2011 and represent the most recent figures available. Where no change is noted from the previous edition of the Digest this may simply mean that ICPS has not been notified of a change.

Further statistics can be found on the World Prison Brief page of the International Centre for Prison Studies website www.prisonstudies.org

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