



INTERNATIONAL PRISON NEWS DIGEST

24th Edition – November - December 2014

Welcome to the twenty fourth edition of the International Prison 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 November to 31 December 2014. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

[Iran](#)'s prison population has multiplied 21 times since the mullahs came to power 35 years ago, the latest figures have revealed. The increase is in stark comparison to Iran's population, which has only doubled since 1979. The Director General of Iran's Prisons Organization said in an interview with the regime parliament's website: "The number of prisoners is double the capacity of the country's prisons. This overcrowding has disrupted educational activities for prisoners... Over 70% of those imprisoned in Iran are under the age of 40 years old."

The Controller-General of the [Ghana](#) Prisons Service has expressed concern over the increasing number of remand cases in the country's prisons. In October 2014 around 21 percent of prisoners were being held on remand. Overcrowding is a serious problem in Ghana, with the Controller-General noting that "in some prisons like Nsawam, Kumasi, Sunyani, Sekondi, Tarkwa and Tamale, overcrowding rate ranges from 150 to 300 percent each day. This is largely due to the presence of high number of remand prisoners in those prisons."

Two new prisons are being built in [Honduras](#) as part of a reform of the prison system aimed at tackling overcrowding. A minimum security prison for 2,000 prisoners is expected to be completed in December 2014. A medium and maximum security prison with capacity for 2,500 prisoners is also being built. As well as building the new prisons, Honduras is planning to reduce overcrowding by offering pardons to prisoners convicted of minor crimes who have completed half their sentence and demonstrated good behaviour. While no definite timetable has been set to begin this process, the head of the human rights secretariat has said the government expects to begin approving pardons during the administration of the current president.

The [Saudi Arabian](#) General Directorate of Prisons has said that three correctional institutions for the treatment, training and social rehabilitation of young offenders will be established in Riyadh, Jeddah and Taif to accommodate 12,000 prisoners. A report by the directorate said that these modern prison facilities will include 96 high security units, 5,120 medium security places which will also provide various social activities for the inmates, and 512 places in units with minimum security measures where the prisoners will be allowed to go out of their cells without any security measures. Prisoners wishing to spend some private time with their families will also be allocated 16 residential units, which include a bedroom, toilets and one kitchen, as well as a garden with toys for children. The three correctional institutions will feature study classes for primary, middle and secondary educational levels. A number of classes will be equipped with computers and specific equipment for those who wish to continue with higher studies.

The [Thai](#) Department of Probation is considering amending legislation to allow people given prison sentences of up to five years to be released on probation, to ease overcrowding in prisons. The department chief said on Tuesday the department is preparing a draft amendment to help ease prison overcrowding. It would extend the eligibility for offenders to be given probation in lieu of jail from prison sentences of up to three years to up to five years. The chief noted that there are currently, about 400,000 people on probation, and said "Proposed amendments of the legislation will increase the number of people put on probation, but will ease prison overcrowding and give opportunities to those who commit mistakes to turn a new leaf and return to society."

The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) says [Cyprus](#) needs to take action to alleviate overcrowding at the country's sole prisons complex. The CPT noted that despite efforts to increase capacity at Nicosia's Central Prisons facility, overcrowding remains a problem that strains relations between prisoners and staff. The report says Cypriot authorities should consider alternatives to prison time for those handed short sentences. It also calls on authorities to ensure migrants are held in appropriate detention centres instead of police stations that are unsuitable for the purpose. It also urged a reduction in the amount of time individuals are kept in detention at police stations.

[Switzerland](#) is considering transporting prisoners to France or Germany as its own prisons have exceeded capacity, according to the chief Swiss prison official. Switzerland's Federal Department of Justice and Police has asked the Federal Office of Justice, which is under its auspices, to clarify under what circumstances the prisoners could be allowed to serve out their time abroad. Prisons in the country's French speaking western cantons or states are

said to be particularly overstrated. Germany and France have both been mentioned as states which could potentially take prisoners.

The United Nations has called for the abolition of [Australia](#)'s mandatory sentencing laws to reduce Indigenous imprisonment rates. It is the second time the UN committee against torture has urged Australia to have its states abolish the laws, arguing there is mounting proof they affect Indigenous people disproportionately. Indigenous people make up more than a quarter of the country's prison population, but only 2-3 percent of the general population, while in the Northern Territory the prison population is almost 90% Indigenous. Among juveniles in Australian detention centres, 48% are Indigenous. The committee said Australia should increase its efforts to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prison and "review mandatory sentencing laws with a view to abolishing them, giving judges the necessary discretion to determine relevant individual circumstances."

Health

In [Australia](#), plans to introduce a needle exchange programme at Canberra's jail appear to have moved a step closer. The union representing corrections officers has offered an olive branch to the ACT Government to break the deadlock over the controversial program. The Government has previously said it wants to introduce a needle and syringe program at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) to stop the spread of bloodborne viruses. But a clause in the prison guards' workplace agreement has prevented it going ahead without consultation and agreement from unions. The union argued prison officers feared the introduction of a formal needle exchange programme would put staff and other prisoners at risk. A union spokesman said the clause could be removed if it were replaced with a new clause that only requires the support of a majority of staff. "This is a really significant compromise," he said.

Doctors in Mumbai, [India](#), have reported an increase in the number of cases of multi-drug resistant TB (MDR TB) in the city. Doctors are especially worried about an outbreak in prisons as it is a highly communicable disease and can affect more than 30 people at once. Low ventilation, poor diet, overcrowding, lack of availability of medicines and low detection rates can lead to the rampant spread of the disease in the prison, said the doctors. Dr Deepesh Reddy, who has worked for WHO's TB control programme in the city, said that although MDR TB figures among Indian prisoners were not readily available they were high and the disease was continuing to spread. He said that health check-ups for prisoners are generally prioritised depending on their severity. Consequently, TB, which starts as a minor illness with cough or mild fever, can go undetected in the early stages, leading to a delay in diagnosis. "The chances of the disease spreading in Indian prisons is high as the healthcare facilities available for them are not comprehensive enough to take care of MDR TB patients who need holistic care, especially considering the toxic and sometimes psychotic side effects of the drugs," said Dr Reddy.

Participants in a regional symposium commended [Kuwait](#) on the healthcare services offered to prisoners in the country. The Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Private Services told the conference that each Kuwaiti prison has a special ward for new prisoners, under the supervision of a medical team. Prisoners are referred to public

hospitals in cases when the service they need is not available in prison clinics. A nutrition specialist supervises the preparation of meals offered to prisoners and services are equally offered to all prisoners.

Treatment of prisoners

Nearly 2,000 people have died in [Syrian](#) prisons of torture, starvation and lack of medical treatment in 2014, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The British-based monitor said it had documented 1,917 deaths in Syrian prisons since the start of 2014, among them 27 children under the age of 18 and 11 women. Rights groups have regularly criticized conditions in Syrian detention facilities, accusing the regime of widespread torture and abuse.

A months-long water shortage at [Cambodia's](#) Prey Sar prison led to ill health and fighting among prisoners, as prices for the "luxury" commodity continued to soar out of their reach, according to prisoners and rights groups. According to officials, the water system was cut off earlier this year because of construction works outside the facility. But while the majority of prisoners are suffering from the shortage, guards and well-connected prisoners have allegedly cashed in. Speaking from the prison, one prisoner said that the cost of water had hit an all-time high, at "20 times" the pre-shortage price. The prisoner said that he is now forced to pay "an extra \$15 a month for water."

A team from the [Nepalese](#) National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has described Kaski jail as a 'torture house' given the dire state of the prison and its prisoners. The team visited the jail and found it overcrowded, with 520 prisoners held in space for only 60. The prisoners cannot stretch their limbs to sleep and there are only seven toilets for males and three for females. Also in [Nepal](#), prisoners at Dadeldhura prison are being forced to sleep outside in homemade tents due to a shortage of space in the prison, which was designed for 25 but was holding 73 prisoners. One prisoner reported that the prison cells have developed cracks in the walls and water continually leaks from the roof. Another prisoner said "We lack drinking water. We wash clothes and bathe every alternative day due to severe water shortage," adding that the prison has only two toilets for 73 prisoners.

United Nations human rights investigators have been prevented from completing their investigations into reports of torture and killing of [Gambians](#) by the government. The Gambia initially accepted the UN officials' terms of reference but then denied them access to certain prison areas. These include the security wing of Mile Two central prison where death row prisoners and political prisoners are held, often in solitary confinement for lengthy periods, and subjected to torture. Special investigator Christof Heyns said in a statement that "an inference must be drawn that there is something important to hide." The investigators' final reports on their visit will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in early 2015.

One out of every four [Canadian](#) prisoners who went through the federal prison system last year spent some time in solitary confinement according to the Correctional Investigator. Segregating a man or woman from the rest of the population is supposed to be used sparingly as a last resort, the Investigator said in an interview. But the agency that runs

Canada's federal prisons and community corrections centres is increasingly turning to solitary confinement to manage institutions that are crowded and lack sufficient resources to deal with high-needs prisoners. "It's become a default population-management strategy," he said. Days after the Investigator's comments, the [Canadian](#) federal government rejected growing calls to put time constraints on prison segregation. In its long-awaited response to more than 100 recommendations stemming from a coroner's inquest held one year ago into the high-profile prison death of Ashley Smith, the Correctional Service of Canada did, however, say it would work to reduce the number of prisoners placed in isolation.

[Belgian](#) authorities should implement measures to improve prison conditions in the country in order to comply with human rights laws, according to the European Court of Human Rights. The court has "recommended that Belgium envisage adopting general measures in order to guarantee prisoners conditions of detention compatible with Article 3 of the Convention and also to provide them with a remedy capable of putting a stop to an alleged violation or permitting them to obtain an improvement in their conditions of detention." The recommendations were made as the court passed its judgment in the case of a Romanian citizen, Vasilescu, who was detained in Belgium between 2011 and 2012. Vasilescu turned to the human rights court in 2012, complaining of inhuman and degrading conditions at the facilities in which he was detained. The court found Vasilescu's claims of overcrowding and unsatisfactory sanitary conditions to be "most plausible" and a reflection of the realities described by the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee following visits to Belgian prisons. Conditions in Belgian prisons have been criticized for years by national and international observers "without any improvement apparently having been made," the court said.

The [US](#) is falling short of complying with an international anti-torture treaty, a United Nations report has found. Police brutality, military interrogations and prisons were among the UN Committee Against Torture's top concerns when they released their report. The panel criticised the US record on military interrogations, maximum security prisons, illegal migrants and solitary confinement while calling for tougher federal laws to define and outlaw torture, including in relation to detainees at Guantanamo Bay and in Yemen. It also called for a ban on interrogation techniques that rely on sleep or sensory deprivation.

The way [Sweden](#) treats children living in detention centres has been strongly criticised by the United Nations Committee against Torture, which also suggested some young offenders had experienced violence by police officers. The UN report called on Sweden to abolish the policy of keeping some child suspects and young offenders in isolation in police cells and juvenile detention centres. A panel of ten independent experts cited concerns about depression, suicides and problems with reintegrating into society for those who spent many hours alone. It said that Sweden had repeatedly breached the UN Torture Convention, which states that under 18s should not sit in isolation for more than 22 hours in any 24 hour period.

Preliminary findings by the Human Rights Commission (HRC) have revealed that prisons and other detention facilities in [Zambia](#) are still not fit for habitation. The HRC's inspection findings revealed that congestion remained a major problem as most of the facilities were built in the colonial era to hold a smaller inmate population, citing Chipata Central Prison as

the most crowded with 758 inmates against the official holding capacity of 250. There was also evidence of torture in the form of beatings or whipping with crude instruments, physical assault and injuries as well as psychological abuse inflicted on detainees by the officers and fellow prisoners. There was no physical separation between untried and convicted prisoners, and young offenders were not treated differently from adults, particularly in prisons without provision for young offenders. The commission also found that prisons were not designed to accommodate persons with physical disabilities, and there were inadequate food and health services for prisoners.

Prison violence

Forty three juvenile prisoners escaped from a youth detention centre in Bogota, [Colombia](#), after setting fire to their sheets and mattresses during a riot. Ten people were injured in the incident; five youths and five educators who worked at the institution. Colombian prisons face overcrowding problems and have experienced several strikes by prison guards over this issue and general work conditions.

A rebellion at a prison in southern [Brazil](#) ended when some 90 inmates freed the final three guards they had held hostage for 45 hours, authorities said. The episode began when prisoners took seven guards hostage to demand an end to the use of handcuffs inside the prison and improvements to medical care and legal services for prisoners. The prisoners released the guards in return for authorities' agreeing to address some of the demands.

[Russian](#) authorities reported they had quashed a riot at a pre-trial detention centre in the Ural mountains city of Chelyabinsk. Officials at the facility said that around 100 prisoners had maimed themselves or set their mattresses on fire in protest after a prisoner was placed in solitary confinement for refusing to obey guards. The officials denied relatives' claims that guards had severely beaten prisoners at the facility. The Russian prosecutor-general's office said that senior regional and city prosecutors were investigating the incident. Unrest is common in Russia's overcrowded prisons and pre-trial detention facilities.

One person was killed and 11 injured after a fight among prisoners being held on death row in [Yemen](#)'s Sana'a Central Prison. According to the prison warden, the fighting broke out between prisoners over an argument about whether or not to cooperate with a new effort launched by the prison's administration under which it hoped to confiscate knives, mobile phones, and other prohibited items. He said prison guards had already begun confiscating some contraband, but not all prisoners had yet had their phones taken. Some of those who still possessed phones disagreed with others who had had their phones taken away, he said, with the latter trying to get the former to cooperate with prison staff, causing a fight to break out. The prison is home to nearly 2,300 prisoners and is separated into various sections, each containing several cells holding 40-50 prisoners, with each section being monitored by only two guards. Once the prison guards noticed they would not be able to end the fighting, they called anti-riot forces equipped with batons, helmets and protective gear, for help.

[New Zealand](#)'s only privately-run prison, Mt Eden Corrections Facility, has had more prisoner assaults than any other jail for the last three years. The prison's operations were contracted out by the Government and it has been run by global outsourcing firm Serco since May 2011. Figures obtained by Radio New Zealand show that in the 12 months to June 2014 there were 139 fights between prisoners and 26 assaults on guards. There were 141 prisoner assaults in 2013 and 149 in 2012. There were also 39 assaults on guards in the 12 months to June 2013, and 22 attacks in 2012. Mt Eden has the capacity to house 966 prisoners. By comparison, Christchurch Prison has 926 inmates and reported 83 assaults last year. The Corrections Association and the Public Service Association said the figures proved what they had long been saying: that there were simply not enough staff to keep themselves and prisoners safe. Public prisons are required to have at least one guard for every 15 remand prisoners, with a typical wing housing 45 prisoners. However, the Corrections Association president said there was no such requirement at Mt Eden. He said the prison had just two guards per wing.

The rate of violent attacks in closed prisons in [Denmark](#) is on the rise, the newspaper Politiken reports. In 2013, 129 episodes of violence and threats were recorded. In the first nine months of 2014, there were already 134 such episodes. The prison officers' union representative at Vridsløselille prison in Albertslund told the newspaper the number of violent incidents has risen by 100 percent a year in the past two years. In 2014 there have been 52 episodes at that prison alone. "They're very violent attacks," he said, explaining that gang members were responsible for a lot of the violence. The prison and probation service Kriminalforsorgen is aware of the problem and it trying to tackle it by spreading gang members out among the country's prisons, according to the organisation's head of security.

According to the [South African](#) Correctional Services Department's annual report for April 1 2013 to March 31 2014, a total of 682 officials were injured on duty in the country's prisons. Fifty were assaulted and stabbed by prisoners. Of the 682 injured, 338 of them required basic medical attention, while another 332 suffered temporary total disablement, and 10 were permanently disabled. Two died from their injuries but authorities said they were not injured by prisoners. An official at one prison said that they were short-staffed. "Two officers look after more than 200 offenders and when one is on lunch the other is left alone... Our lives are at risk. Offenders can take advantage of the fact that we are outnumbered and attack us. You're not sure what will happen." Another warder said they had to watch their backs all the time. "We open for them and serve them food in fear. We never know when they will attack us."

Hundreds of prisoners took over the main prison in the [Central African Republic](#) capital Bangui. The prisoners, some with weapons, took over the jail, exchanged gunfire with security forces outside the facility, and demanded talks with the head of the C.A.R. prosecution service. A policeman said they were protesting after one of the prisoners died of tuberculosis. They demanded their rights, saying some of them had been held for ten months without trial.

Forty eight prisoners died following a mass drug overdose incident in a [Venezuelan](#) jail. Prisoners at the David Vilorio penitentiary centre in the western state of Lara broke into an infirmary ward, according to officials, after a protest for better living conditions spiralled out

of control. A total of 148 prisoners were intoxicated after ingesting products that included antibiotics and fever-relievers, the government said in its statement. The incident has thrown the spotlight back onto the country's notoriously turbulent prisons, where riots, weapons and drugs are widespread. A bloody riot at that same prison last year claimed over 50 lives. There has been no independent confirmation of what happened during the incident, and rights groups have cast doubts over the official version. The Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons has been collecting testimonies from relatives of prisoners, who say the prisoners were poisoned by water and food brought in from outside.

Developments in rehabilitation

The head of prisons in Makkah, [Saudi Arabia](#), has announced the development of new regulations which would allow prisoners to reduce their sentence by five percent if they successfully pass a school year, or two equivalent training courses, up to a maximum of 15 percent during a prison sentence of one year or more. He said the prisons department is also developing regulations and rules to enable prisoners to work outside prisons and return, as per strategies and guidelines established in a partnership between the private sector and the Ministry of Labor.

The [Mauritius](#) Prisons Service has set up a music room at the Correctional Youth Centre (CYC) for boys and a choir at the women's prison at Beau Bassin. To mark the event, Airports of Mauritius Company Ltd (AML), through its Corporate Social Responsibility fund, has made a donation of Rs 324 000 worth of musical instruments. The Music Making project at the Correctional Youth Centre for boys is an initiative of the Vice-President of the Republic. The project aims at fostering discipline, good behaviour and character building among juveniles. It also meets provisions outlined in the 10-year Strategic Plan of the Prisons department to introduce extracurricular activities for the benefit of juveniles in custody so as develop their personal skills and address their entertainment needs.

Prisoners at two [New Zealand](#) prisons are getting "in-house" tattoo removal sessions. The new service, which prisoners pay for themselves, is aimed at cutting reoffending and is being offered to prisoners at Auckland Prison and Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility. A South Auckland-based clinic visits prisons and removes visible tattoos on faces, necks and lower arms, at a cost of \$30 a session. The chief executive of penal reform group the NZ Howard League, welcomed the move. "It's a positive step to help prisoners rejoin the workforce." Also in [New Zealand](#), prisoners at the Paremuremo prison are being offered a life skills course to help them in their return to the community. The course, called "Life 101", was originally designed for school-leavers. It teaches practical skills including budgeting and cooking which are not part of mainstream schooling. The tutor has adapted the course to fit prison life. Internet access is banned, so he teaches job-search techniques with photocopied screenshots from Seek and Google. A health lesson includes techniques to stop smoking and remove tattoos.

A new online shop on the [Austrian](#) Justice Ministry's website is offering gift items made by prisoners, including handmade metal figurines, board games, and Christmas wreaths and decorations. The shop also features dog baskets and handbags made from recycled jeans. The website promises "gift ideas for any occasion." "Many of our prisoners are talented

craftsmen,” said a spokesman for the prison service. He added that they were often employed when the prison service needed construction work, and were given a variety of training opportunities to learn new skills and crafts. Any profits made from the sale of gift items goes back to the prison service and all prisoners who are employed are paid a normal salary according to their experience, minus social insurance contributions.

A correctional centre in New South Wales, [Australia](#), is to become the first specialist prison to concentrate on rehabilitating Aboriginal prisoners, who make up a quarter of the prison population. Aboriginal men aged between 18 and 25 years will be given priority at Kariong Correctional Centre on the Central Coast from early next year. The facility has been tasked with reducing reoffending rates among young Aboriginal prisoners in a bid to tackle their over-representation in custody. The centre will provide four-month courses for 50 young adult men with sentences of under two years. The program will enlist the support of Aboriginal elders and other community members, and target literacy, numeracy, employment skills, substance abuse and driving skills. Afterwards prisoners will be moved to minimum security correctional centres to engage in vocational training.

The Eastern Regional Jail in Ramdhuni Bhasi Municipality, [Nepal](#) is being developed into a training centre which it is hoped will be a model for the region. The jail has been transformed into a training facility where 90 per cent of the 1,500 prisoners are busy in capacity building and income generating training. Activities related to sports, education and music have also been launched in the jail. There is an adult literacy class, as well as different language classes including English, Japanese, Korean and Hebrew which are aimed at prisoners hoping for foreign employment on release.

Prisoners in Western [Australia](#)'s North West will be guaranteed full-time work after completing training courses while imprisoned. Fortescue Metals Group (FMG) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the WA Government through the Department of Corrective Services to deliver the Vocational, Training and Employment Centre (VTEC) Fresh Start Program, with an initial intake of eight prisoners from Roebourne Prison over the next year. Under the new program, FMG will provide a training course for prisoners at Roebourne via a day release scheme. Upon release the students then begin site-based training for two weeks, after which they are guaranteed a job.

[Latin America](#) needs to implement more educational and employment programmes to achieve more effective social reintegration of prisoners, as well as to convince the population of the need for this type of an initiative, experts said at a forum in Costa Rica. The Secretary General of the Conference of Ministers of Justice of Ibero-American Countries (COMJIB) noted that the prison situation in Latin America was complex with major issues relating to overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure. The Costa Rican Justice Minister said it was imperative for the region to assume a preventative and inclusive approach in justice policies and include educational programs for those in jail, and also advocated alternative detention measures for certain types of crimes to reduce prison overcrowding. At the conference, the participating countries signed five documents related to rules for social and labour reintegration, specific standards for the rehabilitation of women, a protocol for cooperation with private companies, a protocol for coordination between institutions and a communication strategy.

Prisoners in a number of prisons in Kerala, [India](#), will soon be able to obtain special bank loans to allow them to start a business on their release. The State Level Bankers Committee (SLBC) is establishing the scheme, called 'Punarjani,' The project is aimed at helping prisoners who are first time offenders and “committed their crime in a fit of anger.” The banks will offer them a loan after the completion of their jail term and assist them in setting up of their own business. Loans will be provided without any collateral, and if prisoners are the sole bread winners in their family, the dependent members of the family too can also apply for loans under the scheme.

A memorandum of understanding has been signed between the Ministry of Justice, the University of [Cyprus](#), and Nicosia Central Prisons. Speaking to the media following an official ceremony, the Minister of Justice said the signing of the memorandum is part of ongoing effort to reform the Cyprus prison system. “Through the support of the Department of Psychology and Sociology of the University of Cyprus we aim to create a special psychological support centre for prison guards within the correctional facility as well as boost the existing rehabilitation services for inmates.” The minister added that the university will provide assistance through scholarships and student placements.

Sentencing and the law

Dozens of prisoners in [Serbia](#) appealed to the country's top human rights official in early November, saying they faced spending more time in prison than necessary due to an almost two-month-old strike by lawyers. Lawyers in the country had been on strike since September 10, boycotting most court proceedings in a dispute with the government over taxes and the role of notaries. A spokeswoman for Belgrade's High Court said 320 trials involving defendants in court detention had been postponed due to the strike. A senior judge was quoted as saying the strike had forced the postponement of more than 100,000 court hearings in total. The Bar Association of Serbia, which is leading the strike, dismissed the prisoners' complaints, saying courts could decide on detention with or without defence lawyers. However, Serbia's courts are widely seen as slow, inefficient and susceptible to corruption and political influence. The strike has slowed the rate of appeals against detention. Serbia has committed to reform its already overloaded judicial system as part of efforts to meet standards set by the European Union, which it hopes to join.

[Saudi Arabia](#)'s High Judiciary Council has told the local courts to implement the concept of alternatives to prison to help reduce crowding in the country's jails. In a note to all courts, the council said the concept of alternatives to prison was among the recommendations reached by the interior ministry's centre for research on combating crimes after it conducted a study on the crimes related to “disobedience to parents” and held several workshops on the issue. Alternative options to spending time in jail include working in homes for the elderly, engaging in ritual washing of corpses, digging graves and providing services at rehabilitation centres. The council said that the courts should play an active role in using alternatives to prison to help ease the number of prisoners in the country's jails.

The [Mozambican](#) Justice Ministry is preparing the introduction of a system whereby courts can grant alternative punishments to prison, according to the Justice Minister, who said this

would take the form of compulsory community service. The measure will cover first time offenders found guilty of crimes which carry prison sentences of up to eight years. She said the introduction of alternative penalties seeks to re-integrate prisoners into the community so that they have the opportunity to redeem themselves in the eyes of society. She appealed for community support in their reintegration. The Minister said she expected the legislation on alternative penalties to take effect from August 2015 and that it would immediately release from prison more than 80 per cent of prisoners who are serving sentences not longer than eight years.

[Malawi](#)'s judiciary has said it will soon sit to re-hear the cases of prisoners who were previously sentenced to the mandatory death penalty. Prior to its amendment in 2011, the Penal Code stated that "any person convicted of murder shall be sentenced to death." However in 2007 the High Court held that the imposition of the mandatory death sentence was a violation of the right to a fair trial provided for under Section 42 of the Constitution and was therefore unconstitutional. The re-hearing will only deal with the question of the sentence, according to the Registrar of the High Court of Malawi and Malawi Supreme Court of Appeal.

Prison policy

A [Nigerian](#) Federal High court has ruled that prisoners in all prisons in the country have the right to vote in elections. Ruling in a suit filed by a number of prisoners against the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Comptroller-General of Nigeria Prisons Service, the court presided over by Justice Mohammed Lima compelled the defendants (the national authorities) to ensure that the applicants are not disenfranchised. Justice Lima in his ruling held that "any act by the first Defendant to deny inmates the right to vote is unconstitutional, illegal, irregular, unlawful, null and void and of no effect whatsoever; that the Defendants do not have the constitutional right to deny the claimants their voting rights; that being an inmate is not an offence that impedes their registration and voting right under section 24 of the Electoral Act; and that the exclusion of inmates in elections conducted in Nigeria is illegal, ultra vires and null and void."

A lack of funds for staff has left [Spain](#) with five new prisons, built at a cost of over €1.1 billion (\$1.4 billion) standing empty, including the world's largest vacant prison near Malaga which has 1,000 cells in 16 buildings. Its facilities include a football pitch, a solar heating plant and a dedicated water treatment plant. It was built at a cost of €117 million and was predicted to have 2,000 prisoners and 600 workers. Two thousand prison jobs have been axed because of budget cuts, putting strain on those who remain. Between 900 and 3,000 more people would be needed to staff the new prisons. According to Spanish daily El País, 85 per cent of Spain's existing prisons have fewer guards, medical staff and other qualified personnel than in 2011 and the staff who remain are ageing: in 2020, a third of prison personnel will be aged over 58.

[Kazakhstan](#) will invite foreign companies to bid for the construction of new prisons in the country. The deputy Chairman of the state Penitentiary Oversight Committee told reporters that foreign investors and companies would start taking part in tendering for the

construction of new Kazakh penitentiaries in 2015-2016. He added that the state will continue to run the prisons while private businesses, domestic and foreign, will be responsible for construction only. Kazakhstan has faced criticism over conditions at prisons and pre-trial detention facilities for many years.

In the [US](#), New York's Rikers Island jail has opened a housing unit for transgender women, in an historic effort to protect them from violence, rape and harassment. The New York City Department of Correction said that the new housing unit will have an initial capacity of 30 beds, which it said would be sufficient for the number of transgender women at Rikers at any given time. Prisoners will be placed in the unit voluntarily.

Prisoners held at the Central Prison in [Cyprus](#) will be issued documents listing the charges they are facing and details of their case to allow better monitoring of prisoners and to avoid confusion, according to the Justice Minister. The announcement follows a mix-up when a Romanian prisoner who was about to be brought up on charges of raping a fellow prisoner was granted a presidential pardon and deported back to his country. The mistake was only discovered after police officers went to his cell to escort him to court. The Minister said this gap in communication between the prison and police has been there for years and it was "one of the many problems inherited by previous administrations".

Prisoners in [Hungary](#) will be legally obliged to carry out labour and contribute to the cost of their imprisonment from next year, according to a senior prison officer. In the past four years the number of prisoners who carry out work in prisons and for the business organisations of correctional institutions has grown by several thousand, the official said. Companies within the prison system making farm and industrial products turned out 14 billion forints worth last year, according to the deputy head of business and IT in the prison service.

In [Pakistan](#), the Punjab government has decided to give military training to 4,000 newly recruited prison security staff. During the three month training the prison staff members will get commando and sharp shooting training. They will also be trained in dealing with terrorist attacks. The Deputy Inspector General of Punjab Prison, Rawalpindi Region, told Dawn newspaper that the prisons had more prisoners than their capacity and the prison security staff had been equipped with 'Light Machine Guns (LMG), Semi Machine Guns (SMG) and bullet proof Armored Personal Carriers (APC) vans.

The [Philippines](#) government has signed the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the Bureau of Corrections Modernization Act of 2013 which seeks to address the "gaps" in the Philippine correctional system, by providing enough resources and improving both the facilities and the status of Bureau of Corrections personnel running the country's jails. Reforms introduced by the rules include the transfer of the New Bilibid Prison to Laur, Nueva Ecija; a prison guard for every 60 prisoners; a 100 percent salary grade increase for jail personnel and a new training academy in Metro Manila for jail officials, and personnel from other attached agencies of the Department of Justice.

The [UAE](#) Ministry of Interior has introduced a new mobile service allowing people to submit a request to visit prisoners held in prisons across the country via the Ministry's smartphone

application, UAE MoI. The Director-General of Punitive and Correctional Establishments, noted the service aimed to facilitate organised visits for prisoners, and is one of the most important services provided by the Ministry to both citizens and residents.

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