



INTERNATIONAL PRISON NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the twenty third 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 September to 31 October 2014. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Merger of the International Centre for Prison Studies with the Institute for Criminal Policy Research

In November 2014, the International Centre for Prison Studies is merging with the [Institute for Criminal Policy Research](#), Birkbeck, University of London. The Institute for Criminal Policy Research will provide a home within which the Centre's work on the World Prison Brief and other research and project-based activities, including the International Prison News Digest, will continue to grow and develop.

Prison populations

[Norway](#) plans to rent prison space in the Netherlands as the queue of people awaiting imprisonment is growing and renovation work at Norwegian prisons is expected to cut capacity, the justice ministry has announced. "At the moment, the queue is at 1,300 custodial sentences, and there is a great demand for detention space," it said in a statement. "The Netherlands has already leased prison capacity to Belgium for several years." Norwegian prisons are known for their relatively humane treatment of inmates, with non-violent prisoners often held in open prisons with some free personal movement, jobs,

recreation facilities and focus on rehabilitation. A deal for several hundred prison places would allow Norway to avoid overcrowding and maintain its standards while prison renovation work costing up to 4.4 billion crowns (434.58 million pounds) is carried out.

Breaking three consecutive years of decline, the number of people in [US](#) state and federal prisons climbed slightly in 2013, according to a report by the Justice Department. Figures for those held in local jails are not included. The report put the prison population last year at 1,574,741, an increase of about 4,300 over the previous year, but below its high of 1,615,487 in 2009. In what criminologists called an encouraging sign, the number of federal prisoners showed a modest drop for the first time in years. But the federal decline was more than offset by an increase in the number of prisoners at state prisons. The report, some experts said, suggested that policy changes adopted by many states, such as giving second chances to probationers and helping nonviolent drug offenders avoid prison, were limited in their reach.

The number people held in [Hong Kong](#)'s jails has fallen to fewer than 9,000, a record low. As of June, the prison population was 8,906, made up of 7,249 detainees - those in prisons, drug treatment and rehabilitation centres - and 1,657 people on remand awaiting trial. Each year over the past decade, Hong Kong's overall prison population has decreased, while the number of those held in drug addiction treatment centres has risen, suggesting a less draconian approach to sentencing. Possible reasons for the downward trend include fewer mainlanders overstaying their visas and more non-custodial sentences being passed, especially on young, first-time offenders. A departmental spokeswoman said it was hard to explain the trend. "The penal population depends on a number of social, economic, demographic and crime factors and the changing trend cannot be fully accounted for without an in-depth investigation," she said.

The [Nepalese](#) government has increased the operational housing capacity of the country's prisons from 7,782 to 10,433 in the past two years. Despite the slight increase in capacity, the 74 prisons were holding 16,813 prisoners in October 2014. Recent statistics provided by the Department of Prison Management indicate that all prisons across the country are overcrowded. Of the prisoners, 15,591 are males and 1,222 are females. Similarly, 924 are foreigners and 82 are dependent children. In order to address the overcrowding the government is planning to begin construction of a state-of-the-art new Central Jail with capacity for 5,000 prisoners in Bidur municipality in Nuwakot within next five months.

[Tajikistan](#)'s president has submitted to the parliament a draft law on amnesty granting freedom to some 10,000 prisoners. The office of the president said the bill would release women, minors, the disabled, war veterans, and foreign citizens, as well as those who have served at least three-quarters of their jail terms. However, it does not grant amnesty to those convicted of serious crimes, including murder, treason, or terrorism.

The government in [Myanmar](#) has pardoned over 3,000 prisoners but advocacy groups said no political detainees were included despite a pledge to free all of them by the end of this year. The Ministry of Information announced the amnesty on its website, saying the 3,073 prisoners were being freed "on humanitarian grounds". It did not mention political prisoners. Most of those released had committed minor crimes but at least eight were

former intelligence officers jailed a decade ago as part of a political purge. The release came a month ahead of a summit of Asia-Pacific leaders to be held in the country.

In a landmark ruling, [India](#)'s Supreme Court has ordered the country's overcrowded jails to free all prisoners who have served half their maximum term without trial. More than two-thirds of India's prisoners are awaiting trial, many having already spent years in prison. Indian law already states that prisoners awaiting trial must be released once they have served half the maximum sentence they would receive if found guilty, but that law is rarely implemented. The country's Chief Justice said prisons across the country must comply with the law, and ordered local judges and magistrates to oversee the process.

Prison staff in [Colombia](#) locked down 109 of the country's prisons, refusing to accept new prisoners or to release those who had completed their sentence or needed to leave the prison for medical reasons. The prison guards have been protesting since August, demanding better pay and working conditions, but the government has failed to come to an agreement with them. In September the Ombudsman warned that Colombia's overcrowded prisons and the ongoing staff strike demanded that the government declare an emergency. The problem of overcrowding in [Colombia](#)'s prisoners was highlighted when it was reported that prisoners were being held in a park, sleeping outside or in tents bought for them by their families, due to lack of space at the nearby La Granja detention centre.

Contrary to international laws and [Cambodia](#)'s own legal code, pre-trial detention is becoming more prevalent among children than adults, according to data compiled by a trial monitoring project. Imprisoning those aged under 18 should only be an absolute last resort according to child rights conventions. Yet 87 percent of Cambodia's juveniles are being held in pre-trial detention. The data were compiled by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights which monitored 2,588 trials from 2009 to 2012.

Imprisonment rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in [Australia](#) have increased by 18 percent in the past year as the government moves to effectively cut funding to Indigenous legal and family violence prevention services. The rate of non-Indigenous women going to jail also increased, by 13 percent, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 28 percent of the prison population and two percent of the general population. The states of New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia hold 75% of the Indigenous prison population.

The independent prisons watchdog has criticised the Department of Corrective Services for failing to address Western [Australia](#)'s rapid increase in female prisoners, labelling the overcrowding situation a "crisis". The Inspector of Custodial Services has accused the department of neglecting women prisoners, leaving them housed in inappropriate accommodation, in unsuitable locations and without access to adequate resources. In a report tabled in the State Parliament, the Inspector called for the establishment of the position of Director of Women's Corrective Services to drive focus on the issues. The report said there were 486 women in the state's prison system, which represented a 40 percent increase in the past five years. In contrast, the number of male prisoners increased by 15 percent over the same period.

Health

People who have been in prison run a higher risk of committing suicide - 18 times that of the general population - according to a study of prisoners in [Sweden](#). The study found that by far the highest risk of suicide comes in the first months after release and among individuals with a history of substance abuse and previous suicide attempts. The study covered almost 27,000 people who were released from Swedish prisons just under 40,000 times in a five year period from 2005 – 2009. These people were compared with 270,000 unconvicted control subjects, matched for sex and age, from the general population. At the end of 2009, 920 of the released prisoners had died, and of these 14 percent had taken their own life, 18 times the number in the general population. The study's authors hoped the findings might be able to provide guidance in assessing suicide risk and for suicide prevention efforts by healthcare staff, probation services and social services for those being released from prison.

Seventeen health professionals completed a five-day seminar in Addis Ababa, [Ethiopia](#), on mental health in prisons. The aim of the training, organized jointly by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Ethiopia's federal prison administration, was to enhance the participants' skills in detecting, treating and managing mental-health problems among detainees, in accordance with recommendations issued by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to WHO, at least half of the more than nine million detainees around the world struggle with personality disorders, and about one million prisoners worldwide suffer from serious mental disorders such as psychosis or depression. Misunderstanding and stigma surrounding mental illnesses combined with limited resources can make it difficult for detainees with such disorders to obtain the health care or other support they require. "By organizing this seminar for prison health staff, we are reaffirming the right of prisoners, like any members of society, to mental-health services," said the deputy director-general of the federal prison administration.

One hundred inmates a year at Cloverhill, [Ireland](#)'s largest remand prison are being referred to services outside the jail system for pronounced mental health problems according to Dr Conor O'Neill, consultant forensic psychiatrist at the Central Mental Hospital Dundrum. He also said that 44 percent of the people dealt with by the diversion service in the prison last year were homeless. Over the past eight years more than 25,000 prisoners at the jail have been screened, with approximately 4,000 then assessed and of those, 800 diverted for treatment, typically to community-based services. Dr O'Neill said that "in the main", those that required treatment were on remand for minor or relatively trivial offences, yet may have had a serious mental health illness, including schizophrenia.

USAID and the AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW) are launching a programme in Bishkek, [Kyrgyzstan](#) designed to decrease the HIV infection rate in prisons across the country. HIV React is a two-year regional project designed to enhance HIV prevention, treatment, and medical care in prisons. It has a special focus on intravenous drug users and prisoners living with HIV. It will make use of a tested model of support for prisoners before and after their release. The model is designed to act as a bridge for people to transition from prison to society and diminish the risk of HIV infection, the United States Embassy in Bishkek said.

The Centre for Human Rights Education, Advice and Assistance (CHREAA) has commended the [Malawian](#) government for increasing the budget for prison health. The government said the 2014/15 budget for prisons is now over MK164million (US\$410,000) from last year's MK60million (US\$150,000). The CHREAA Executive Director said that the increase demonstrates that the government believes that health challenges in prisons must be addressed. "This strong increase will provide the necessary provisions to enable prevent the spread of diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and Sexual Transmitted Infections in prisons," he said. Malawi prisons have been well known locally and internationally for their poor conditions among them being congestion leading to communicable diseases.

During 2012, 958 inmates died while in the custody of local jails, the [US](#) Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has announced. This was an eight percent increase from the 889 deaths in 2011 and marked the first annual increase in the number of jail deaths since 2009. State prisons reported 3,351 deaths in 2012, which was nearly equal to the number of deaths (3,353) in 2011. However, due to a decrease in the state prison population, the mortality rate increased two percent, from 260 deaths per 100,000 state prisoners in 2011 to 264 deaths per 100,000 in 2012. Jails are operated by local authorities (such as sheriffs' offices or county and city governments) and typically hold persons not yet sentenced or sentenced to serve one year or less. State prisons are operated by state departments of corrections and generally hold inmates sentenced to more than one year.

In [South Korea](#) the Seoul Central District Court has ruled that the state should pay compensation to the family of a prisoner who committed suicide in his prison cell. The state was ordered to pay 34 million won (\$31,000) in compensation to the bereaved family, saying that the staff at the detention centre had been negligent in their oversight of detainees. The prisoner was found dead in his cell despite being monitored, with the court ruling that his death was "due to lack of immediate and preventive measures by the detention centre." Since 2009, 34 detainees have taken their own lives in detention centres.

Prisoners in [Turkey](#) who are unfit to remain in prison due to their deteriorating health will be released on probation under a planned legal amendment. The amendment will grant release for terminally ill prisoners, while those suffering from severe but non-fatal illnesses will be released but subject to electronic tagging. The new amendment is due to be announced in October.

Treatment of prisoners

At least four prisoners in Wau central prison in [South Sudan](#)'s Western Bahr el Ghazal state have reportedly died. Prison sources told a newspaper that poor living conditions inside the facility were to blame. "The inmates' conditions are deteriorating at Wau central prison due to overcrowding," the officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said. He said temperatures inside the prison cells often reach dangerously high levels and prisoners are often forced to sleep on the bare floor without bedding.

An average of 161 prisoners sent to work camps in [Myanmar](#) between 1978 and 2004 died of starvation and other causes each year, according to the deputy Minister of Home Affairs. The number fell to an average of 142 deaths per year from May 12, 2004 to March 31, 2011,

the deputy Minister said, putting this decline in fatalities down to a change in the work prisoners were forced to do. Instead of having to turn rocks into gravel, clear forests and build roads, 2004 saw a switch to agricultural and livestock-breeding work. During this period 999 prisoners died at the camps. The number of deaths at 46 camps has fallen to a rate of 36 per year from April 1, 2011 to August 31 of this year, or a total of 142.

The [US](#) state of Virginia's practice of automatically holding death row prisoners in solitary confinement will be reviewed by a federal appeals court. Experts say that if the court upholds a ruling in favour of condemned prisoner Alfredo Prieto, prisoners in other death penalty states could be encouraged to file similar challenges. A U.S. District Judge ruled last year that solitary confinement on death row is so onerous that the Virginia Department of Corrections must assess its necessity on a case-by-case basis. She said failure to do so is a violation of due process. The state argues in its appeal that courts should defer to the judgment of prison officials on safety issues.

Twenty-nine men serving life sentences in [Armenia's](#) largest prison went on hunger strike to demand that the authorities review their cases or legally increase their chances of being released. Eleven of them ended the protest later in the day after receiving fresh assurances that the Armenian Justice Ministry is addressing their demands. A ministry spokeswoman said officials at Yerevan's Nubarashen prison informed them that "legislative changes are expected regarding those sentenced to life in prison and their prison conditions." She gave no details of those changes. The prisoners heard similar promises before ending their previous, three-day hunger strike in July. A total of 104 people are currently serving life sentences in Armenia for murders and other grave crimes. Ninety of them are kept at Nubarashen.

A report by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) into conditions in [Greek](#) prisons found that no improvements have been made despite recommendations made two years ago. The Committee found that most prisons were operating at double or triple capacity, with prisoners sharing beds or sleeping on mattresses on the floor. In the men's section of the country's largest prison, Korydallos, there were two prison officers on staff for a wing of 400 men. With prisons beyond capacity, hundreds of suspects on remand or newly convicted are held for months in police stations, where cells "are all totally unsuitable" to house people for more than 24 hours. The CPT described one such cell of 12 square metres (130 square feet) that held eight people, with detainees sleeping sitting on a chair, a table or on cardboard on the floor.

[Ugandan](#) prisons will be rid of the dehumanising 'night soil bucket' system in the next two years as part of a grand scheme to improve hygiene in reformatories. The night soil bucket system is a policy in Ugandan jails which sees prisoners use a bucket to relieve themselves at night. This system has been the object of excoriation in a number of reports by the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) for being "unhygienic and dehumanising." Given the congestion in Ugandan prisons, the stench that comes from having a bucket full of faecal matter in an overcrowded jail compartment, UHRC contends, turns prisons into a breeding centre for diseases.

Overpopulated cells, little access to the justice system, the indiscriminate use of provisional premises, precarious infrastructure, and other problems faced by prisons in [Brazil](#) were debated by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The UN Working Group on arbitrary detention presented a report which was drafted by experts after their visit to seven detention facilities in the country, in the cities of Brasília, Campo Grande, Fortaleza, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in May 2013. The text condemns the deprivation of liberty, regarded as excessive, and maintains that it is "being used as a first resort rather than the last, as stipulated by international human rights standards." According to the UN, this is a "worrying trend". The report further highlights the number of arbitrary arrests, the lack of separation between sentenced and remand prisoners, and abuse from prison wardens and police officers.

A prisoner in Padua, [Italy](#), has been awarded 5,000 euros compensation for having to live in a 2.85 square meter cell. The compensation is the first of its kind in Italy since its prison system clashed with the European Court of Human Rights on detention conditions. On January 9, 2013, the court ruled that overcrowded prisons were violating the human rights of prisoners. This followed 2009's filing of complaints by seven prisoners from two Italian prisons, alleging that their cells were overcrowded and had no hot water or adequate lighting. As a result the Strasbourg court gave Italy one year to solve the issue, fining the system 100,000 euro. As part of the ruling, each prisoner is to have a minimum of three square metres of living space.

[Malta](#) has made progress in preventing the torture and ill-treatment of people deprived of their liberty by setting up two national monitoring bodies in line with its treaty obligations, but more needs to be done, UN rights experts said at the end of their first official visit to the country. "We acknowledge the first step the Maltese authorities have taken towards preventing torture and ill-treatment by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) and designating two monitoring bodies," said the head of the delegation from the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT). "But through our meetings with different stakeholders, we have seen that significant work needs to be done to make these bodies fully independent and effective in line with OPCAT and other relevant international standards," she added.

The [Comorian](#) Foreign and Cooperation Ministry and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have signed an agreement on humanitarian work with detainees. The agreement sets out the procedures for ICRC prison visits, formalising use of the standard procedures the ICRC follows throughout the world, and which the organisation has applied in the Comoros for the last two decades. The aim of the ICRC's visits is to assess prisoner treatment and conditions of detention. The organisation has stepped up its visits over the last three years, and has boosted its efforts to help the authorities improve conditions. At Moroni Prison, the ICRC has built an area where prisoners can receive family visits under suitable conditions, and has installed showers, toilets and kitchens. The organisation has also made improvements to the water supply at the prison. In addition to carrying out practical work, the ICRC has been facilitating discussions between the authorities and organisations that could play a useful role in prison, especially as concerns medical services for the prisoners.

In [Australia](#) the Ombudsman has strongly criticised a prison in northern Queensland for an “unreasonable” practice of methodically strip-searching female prisoners. He recommended prison officers undertake refresher training, that strip searches be properly authorised and documented, that a procedure for dealing with menstruating prisoners subjected to strip searches be introduced, and that a review be undertaken of current oversight mechanisms within the Queensland Corrective Services. A spokesman for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General said its director-general had "accepted unconditionally" the recommendations.

Prison violence

At least four prisoners were killed and nine others wounded, including two guards, after an attempted mass escape at a prison in the [Dominican Republic](#). Guards opened fire on prisoners at the Najayo jail after the prison was attacked by armed men. The Najayo prison houses about 2,000 inmates, including a number of foreigners, mostly for drug trafficking. It is also one of a number of model prisons, established as part of an overhaul of the country's penitentiary system promoting education and more humane living conditions, and staffed by specially trained graduates from a newly created penitentiary academy.

At least 12 guards and dozens of prisoners were held hostage amid an uprising at the Guarapuava prison in Parana state, southern [Brazil](#). At least eight people were reported injured, including six who were thrown from the roof of a building. The prisoners were protesting about poor treatment and bad food. A week later a riot broke out at another prison in [Parana](#) state, with 57 prisoners taking two guards hostage. The rebellion ended when authorities agreed to transfer 20 of the prisoners to other prisons. According to the Justice Secretariat there have been 22 uprisings in prisons in the state so far this year.

Four prisoners died and eleven were wounded during a riot at the El Abra prison in central [Bolivia](#). The riot was sparked by a rivalry between Bolivian and foreign prison gangs, according to the regional police commander. A [second](#) disturbance broke out a few days later in the same prison when prisoners tried to prevent authorities from entering and searching for contraband.

Seven warders at Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison in [South Africa](#) have been beaten and stabbed to death by prisoners using makeshift hammers and knives in the past year. In the same period, three uniformed warders were shot by unidentified gunmen outside the prison. Two of the warders died. Prison officials were investigating why the warders were being targeted, a Pollsmoor spokesman said.

Figures presented to the [South African](#) Parliament by the Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons showed that incidents of torture and assault in the country's prisons have increased from 71 cases in 2013 to 109 this year. There was also an increase in the use of force by prison officials, from just three cases in 2010 to 191 in 2014. NGOs raised concerns that the figures were rising despite torture being criminalised in South Africa in 2013. They called for more investigation by the Department for Correctional Services into cases of torture of prisoners.

In the [US](#) the Secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections has fired nearly three dozen guards in the wake of scrutiny of prisoner deaths across the state in recent years. All of the 32 dismissed guards had been accused of misconduct or wrongdoing stemming from the deaths of prisoners at four different prisons. Florida's prison system came under increasing scrutiny after the circumstances of the 2012 death of mentally ill prisoner Darren Rainey came to light. The American Civil Liberties Union said that Rainey was blasted with scalding hot water in a locked closet-sized shower as a punishment at the state's Dade Correctional Institution in Miami. After two hours, Rainey was found dead with his skin separated from his body, the letter stated. The water temperature was later measured at 180 degrees (82 Celsius), according to court records.

Developments in rehabilitation

Neve Tirza prison, the only women's prison in [Israel](#), hosted a fashion show where models showcased clothes designed and made by the prisoners. The prisoners were all involved as part of a rehabilitation project designed to grant them skills they might use upon their release as well as to restore their self-confidence following their time in prison. Prisoners studying make-up application and hairdressing also helped to style the models. Fifteen prisoners in the Shanghai Juvenile Reformatory in [China](#) also put on a fashion show to showcase their design skills. Figures from the fashion industry attended the show and offered employment contracts to five of the prisoners.

A fish shop has been opened in front of Madurai Central prison in [India](#), eight months after the five prisoners and one guard who have been trained in aquaculture began rearing fish in the backyard of the prison. The 'Freedom Fish Shop' will be open every Sunday to sell fish to the public.

Over 9,000 runners in [Singapore](#) took part in the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run to show support and help raise awareness of the need to give ex-prisoners a second chance. The Yellow Ribbon Prison Run, which covered a scenic 10km Competitive Run or a 6km Fun Run, ended with a carnival in Changi Prison Complex. A total of S\$130,000 was raised from the event, and the money will go towards the Yellow Ribbon Fund to help ex-prisoners and their families.

A [Hungarian](#) prison is preparing to set up its own radio station, called Bars FM, according to media reports. The broadcasts, initially to run for two hours a day, will go on air Oct 1 in the Vac Penitentiary and Prison, some 34 km north of Budapest. The Hungarian venture, supported by psychologist Judit Hajdu and former BBC staff member Zsolt Braun, is designed to offer prisoners information on prison life and to help with readjustment to society following their release. It is also a learning tool, teaching prisoners about the broadcasting profession. This is not the first such cultural initiative at the Vac prison, which has been operating a theatre of its own along with a drama group for a number of years. If the radio station proves successful, there are plans to extend the broadcasts to other prisons in Hungary.

In his annual report, the [Canadian](#) Correctional Investigator has focused on the Correctional Service of Canada's lack of attention to the timely and safe release of prisoners. He said

“Releasing an offender from prison to the community with very little savings, limited skills or options for employment and without a comprehensive, integrated plan to meet unresolved mental health or addiction issues undermines their chances for success.” He said the CSC has a dual mandate of both ensuring the secure custody of those in the prison system and facilitating their proper rehabilitation and release. Despite the CSC’s two obligations, he said only five per cent of the nearly \$2.4 billion in spending is allocated to institutional and community programs for reintegration.

Also in [Canada](#), a number of advocates say they fear federal inmates are losing access to books and libraries, making it harder to improve their literacy skills and prepare them for reintegration into society after they are released. Those advocates say a number of federal prisons are cutting library hours and library staff or closing the facilities entirely. "Access to books is really important, and what we're seeing is an erosion in access to books," the Correctional Investigator said, adding that prisons across Canada are cutting back access, in part a result of security concerns because of overcrowding as it is harder to move prisoners safely from one part of the institution to another if there are too many prisoners for the number of guards. Budget cuts are also affecting access to library materials.

Sentencing and the law

The number of convictions in [Switzerland](#) reached an all-time high in 2013, according to the Federal Statistics Office, with the largest increase in the number of people who broke laws related to immigration and foreigners’ rights. There were a total of 109,278 convictions in 2013, with some 12,202 of those issued for illegal stays in the country, an increase of 20 percent on the previous year. In total 11,880 prison sentences were issued in 2013, up 21.7 percent from 2012. The most common form of punishment remained fines, with 91,346 total fines issued, representing 83.5 percent of all punishments. Community service was only used in 2,813 cases, a 3.3 percent decline on the previous year.

Prisoners serving life sentences without the possibility of parole in the [Cayman Islands](#) will have their periods of imprisonment reduced in the next two years after the Conditional Release Bill 2014 was unanimously approved by lawmakers. The bill introduces a system that sets general guidelines for the release of all prisoners on license conditions. It applies to all those imprisoned, including juveniles, and to those already serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. The bill makes transitional provisions for handling cases involving current prisoners serving life without parole, stating: “The director of prisons shall send to the Grand Court the case records of all prisoners serving life sentences ... and the Grand Court shall ... pronounce in open court a period of incarceration for each prisoner.”

Sentences for those convicted of drug use in [Myanmar](#), which range from five to 15 years, are under review, the Deputy Minister for Home Affairs has told MPs. “Officials from the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control, the Union Attorney-General’s Office and the Union Supreme Court are drawing up an amendment law,” the deputy minister said, adding that legal experts from the UN Office for Drugs and Crime and international NGOs will assist them. In recognition of its failed drug policies, the government in 2012 extended its 15-year drug elimination plan by five years to 2019. The following year, the deputy minister outlined to parliament a new action plan focusing on 51 townships in Shan, Kayah and Chin states,

which aimed to shift the focus from punishing drug users to catching traffickers and money launderers. He stated that the government currently runs 26 major drug treatment centres at larger hospitals and 47 smaller treatment centres.

Thousands of convicted cocaine smugglers in [Ecuador](#) are being released as a result of the country's new criminal code, which came into effect in August. It treats "drug mules" who commit the low-profit, high-risk offence more as vulnerable people exploited by cartels than as hardened criminals. The reform retroactively applies heavily reduced prison sentences to those already convicted of attempting to transport relatively small amounts of drugs — often hidden dangerously inside their own bodies — out of the country. Around 500 mules have already been freed and at least another 2,000 are expected to follow, according to the national coordinator of the Public Defender's Office. The sentence reduction is not automatic and can only happen after a court hearing, which the prisoner has to request.

Murderers and other long-term prisoners are spending an average of 17½ years in prison before being release, according to the [Irish](#) Parole Board. In Ireland, murder carries a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment. Other serious offences such as manslaughter and rape can also lead to a life sentence. However, cases are usually reviewed after seven years. Speaking at the launch of the board's annual report today, the Justice Minister said "lifers" are spending longer behind bars in recent years. "Over the last 30 years, [sentences have] gone from an average of 7½ years for people who have committed murder, right up to 17½ years now," she said. The [Irish](#) Parole Board's annual report also found drugs and alcohol to be a feature in more than two thirds of cases. It was found that substance and alcohol misuse attributed to 72 percent of all crimes committed. This came from either addiction or offenders being under the influence at the time of committing the crime. In the report it was also found that childhood abuse was cited as a factor by almost half (47 percent) of paroled prisoners looked at.

The deputy permanent secretary in the [Thai](#) Justice Ministry has revealed plans to use Bt120 million from the Justice Fund to seek bail for defendants being prosecuted for minor offences such as gambling or encroachment on state land. He said around 59,000 defendants are facing court trials for allegedly committing minor offences, and most do not have the money to secure bail so are remanded into custody. The minister said the project would not only ease prison overcrowding but also improve people's access to justice.

The [Mozambican](#) Bar Association (OAM) has set up a body to expand access to justice to poor people who cannot normally afford the services of a lawyer. Speaking at the formal launch of the Institute for Access to Justice (IAJ), OAM chairperson Tomas Timbana pledged to step up efforts to fight the slow pace of dealing with court cases that is a notorious feature of the Mozambican judicial system. The IAJ has been in operation since May and was set up to provide information, legal advice and legal aid services to citizens lacking the means to pay for a lawyer. Timbana revealed that 1,400 qualified lawyers and 500 trainees were registered under IAJ. Currently IAJ only has offices in Maputo but Timbana said it would shortly have representation in Beira and Nampula.

A bill to introduce the use of electronic tagging to allow the release of prisoners in [Costa Rica](#) who are considered not to pose a threat to the public has been passed in the Legislative

Assembly. According to a report presented by the Minister for Justice in June before the Full Legislative Commission, one day in prison costs \$48 per prisoner, whereas the daily cost for the bracelets ranges from \$11-\$25 (averaging around \$18), a saving of around \$12,000 per year. Those who will be eligible for release on electronic bracelet include first time offenders with a sentence of six months or less, women in an advanced stage of pregnancy, women with children under the age of 12 and people with disabilities.

People who have been imprisoned for serious offences in the [Netherlands](#) should receive lifelong supervision following release from prison even if the judge has not laid down a probationary period, according to a majority in Parliament. MPs propose a plan to allow probation officers to keep supervising these ex-prisoners throughout their lives outside prison. The current ruling allows a judge to extend probation once, for up to two years after the prison term has been fulfilled. This ruling would apply to sex offenders and those who have committed violent crimes, especially if there is a threat of recidivism. Whoever violates their probation will have to return to prison.

Leaders of the four [Danish](#) opposition parties are proposing that the age of criminal responsibility in the country be lowered to 12. The parties believe that lowering the age, which was increased from 14 to 15 just two years ago, will tackle juvenile crime by sending out a signal to Denmark's youth that there is a consequence for every action they take. The proposal will be introduced at the next session of parliament.

Prison policy

In the [US](#), when a group of prisoners attacked two guards at California's High Desert State Prison in 2006, the warden declared a full lockdown that confined African Americans in one wing of the prison to their cells, and kept them there for 14 months with no outdoor exercise, and no rehabilitation programmes or prison jobs. California has now agreed to give up its unique use of race-based punishment as a tool to control violence in its crowded prisons. Corrections chief Jeffrey Beard and lawyers for prisoners have settled a six-year-long civil rights lawsuit, filed in 2008, over the High Desert lockdown. The case was eventually widened to cover all prisoners and lockdown practices that had become common state-wide. The agreement now goes to a federal judge for expected approval.

Also in the [US](#), two Ohio state prisons are believed to be the first in the country testing security drones in hopes of cutting down on illegal activity at the prisons. The Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections has launched a \$170,000 aerostat, also called a "tethered balloon," to monitor security at the Lebanon and Warren Correctional Institutions. The aerostat will have the capability to capture video of the prisons' grounds during the day and night as well as use infrared sensors to detect unwelcome visitors staked near the facility's fences. Testing, which will also examine the aerostat's unique day and night cameras, will last until October 7th. Three different types of unmanned aircrafts will then be tested for roughly 30 days each starting in November. First, the aerostat, or tethered balloon, will get another trial. Then, prison officials will test out a helicopter system, which can take off both inside the prison facility and outside on the grounds. A fixed-wing aircraft will also be given a test run. Different sensors and cameras will be used in each of the drones during the testing period.

Prisoners in [Nigeria](#) will soon be categorised according to the crimes for which they are imprisoned, according to the Minister of the Interior, who said the system would see those who had committed serious crimes separated from those convicted of lesser ones. The Minister said that the changes were triggered by lessons learnt from the recent riot by inmates at the Kirikiri Medium Prison in Apapa area of Lagos State.

Prison authorities in [Russia](#) have announced plans to build Europe's biggest prison in 2015. The new facility in a suburb of Saint Petersburg will have a capacity to house 4,000 inmates, according to the head of Russia's prison service. "It will be the most modern prison in Russia and the biggest in Europe," he said. Europe's current largest prison is believed to be France's Fleury-Merogis Prison on the outskirts of Paris which can hold some 3,800 prisoners. The new Russian facility is due to replace Saint Petersburg's infamous Kresty prison, a red-brick landmark that has housed some of Russia's most high-profile prisoners in its 120-year history.

Authorities in Sharjah, [United Arab Emirates](#), have decided to allow prisoners to meet their wives privately on the grounds this will have positive effect on both the prisoners and their families. 'Al Khilwa Al Sharia' (legal intimate meeting) will be permitted in a new central prison, which is about to be completed, said the director of the punitive and rehabilitation institutions in Sharjah. "The first phase of the new prison buildings will be completed before the end of this year. "It will meet international human rights standards and will comprise rooms assigned for meetings between inmates and their wives as well as children's entertainment centres," he said. "We have taken this decision after a study showed that such meetings will have positive effects on the prisoners and their families as they will maintain their cohesion." He added that the new prison would include separate buildings for male and female inmates, workshops, services centres, a juvenile prison, a mosque, a library, reading halls, a clinic and a pharmacy, restaurants and cafes.

In [Ireland](#), a Strategic Review of Penal Policy has made recommendations including the use of weekend-only prison which would allow prisoners to maintain work, education and family links. The Review also calls for judges to be required to give written explanations for sending someone to prison. The Justice Minister welcomed the recommendations and said they would help shape the future of sentencing. Also in [Ireland](#), people fined in the courts will soon be able to pay the penalty in their local shop while buying their groceries. Under a new plan, the Courts Service is seeking for 480 retail outlets nationwide to participate in the new system of fines payment. It is estimated that retailers will accept as many as 93,000 fine payments each year. One of the objectives of the new legislation is to reduce the number of people sent to prison each year and will allow people pay by instalment.

[Nicaragua](#) has constructed four new prisons and detention centres utilising money that was seized following the arrest of a group of drug traffickers in 2012. Under Operation Televisa, 18 Mexican nationals who posed as journalists and used vehicles displaying the logos of Televisa, a renowned Mexican TV network, to transport drugs from Costa Rica through Nicaragua to Mexico, were sentenced to 18 years in prison. The Nicaraguan police also seized over nine million dollars from the drug traffickers. The money was used to build a maximum security prison, a women's detention centre and a third prison in Bluefields. An

additional \$974 thousand was used to construct another detention centre for non-violent prisoners. The rest of the money was used to modernize the equipment of the Nicaraguan police.

A [Belgian](#) murderer and rapist serving a life sentence is to be allowed to have doctors end his life following a ground-breaking ruling under laws in Belgium permitting people to request euthanasia. Frank Van Den Bleeken had argued that he had no prospect of release since he could not overcome his violent sexual impulses and so he wanted to exercise his right to medically assisted suicide in order to end years of mental anguish. The judicial ruling was the first involving a prisoner since the euthanasia law was introduced 12 years ago. Van Den Bleeken, aged about 50 and in prison for nearly 30 years, had complained of a lack of therapy provided for his condition in Belgium and said therefore he preferred to die.

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