

PRI e-newsletter May 2015

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E-newsletter

May 2015

Welcome to Penal Reform International's monthly e-newsletter, a round-up of PRI and other penal reform news from around the world and a variety of criminal justice and human rights resources.

The views expressed in the news items below are not necessarily those of PRI.

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ANNIVERSARY YEAR RESOURCES ROUND-UP



Dear colleagues,

May marks the end of PRI's 25th anniversary year. While it has been a busy 12 months in all areas of work, I'd like to mention a few of the new resources we've produced. The year began with an [anniversary debate](#) – **If prison doesn't work, what does?** ([available on video](#)) – discussing the human and economic cost of prison and the benefits of non-custodial alternatives. The case for alternatives was persuasively made again in a new short animation launched last May – [Is a prison sentence always the solution?](#) – now available in seven languages and a great resource for training and advocacy.

Throughout the year, we ran a series of expert guest blogs on our website on emerging

trends in criminal justice from radicalisation in prisons, to the 'war on drugs', to prison architecture as a prelude to the launch of our major new report, [Global Prison Trends 2015](#), launched at the [UN Crime Congress in Doha](#) last month along with a [special podcast](#).

It was also a productive year for resources in our thematic programmes, with, for example, new editions of our popular [information packs on the death penalty](#) and [on life and long-term imprisonment](#) and a new [guide to strengthening standards](#) around the use of the death penalty. Our seven-country series of research reports on women prisoners continued with surveys in [Jordan and Tunisia](#) and in Uganda.

Our full annual report to be published in June will provide a full account of our activities in 2014. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy our latest newsletter.

With my best wishes,

Alison Hannah,
Executive Director, PRI

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The revised Standard Minimum Rules are adopted at the UN Crime Commission as the 'Mandela Rules'

PRI is delighted to report that the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ or Crime Commission) adopted the revised Standard Minimum Rules (SMR) for the Treatment of Prisoners at its 24th session last week following a four-year process which PRI intensively engaged in.

The adoption of the revised Rules – to be known as the 'the Mandela Rules' – is a historic moment for the treatment of prisoners and improvement of prison conditions. The revision focussed on nine thematic areas, including healthcare in prisons, investigations of deaths in custody, disciplinary measures, and professionalisation of prison staff and independent inspections. [Find out more](#).

See the [resolution](#) and the [Mandela Rules](#), a [joint-NGO briefing on the process](#) and a [version showing where revisions](#) were made.

Professor Sir Nigel Rodley, member of the UN Human Rights Committee, explains why the revised Rules are so significant in [a blog for PRI on 'bringing the standards up to standard'](#).

Other NGOs issued blogs and statements including [ACLU](#) and [Amnesty International](#).



The NGO delegation celebrate the revision of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Vienna, May 2015.

REGIONAL FOCUS: RUSSIA

Working with businesses to improve job prospects for former prisoners in Russian penal colonies – an emerging model

For the past 18 months, PRI has been part of a multi-stakeholder project to improve the rehabilitation and reintegration, and in particular the employment prospects, of prisoners in the Russian regions of Nizhny Novgorod and Krasnodar regions.

The project is funded by the [Volnoe Delo Foundation](#), a charitable organisation established by Russian businessman, Oleg Deripaska, ten years ago. The Foundation has developed its own localised model, drawing on good practice from Russia and further afield, and provides various forms of practical and psycho-social support for prisoners coming up for release. It has a particular focus on giving prisoners employable skills that they can use locally and strong relationships have been built with large local employers who agree to take on prisoners after their release.

[Read more about it](#)

New! Each month, we will be focusing on developments of interest from our regional or country programmes – next month, Kazakhstan.

GLOBAL ADVOCACY

Impact of the world drug problem on the enjoyment of human rights

Last month, PRI and Harm Reduction International made [a joint submission to the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) on the human rights impact of current drug policies in the criminal justice system. The OHCHR will issue its own report ahead of the [UN General Assembly Special Session](#) on the world drug problem in April 2016.

The submission provides a useful account of the many human rights concerns that have arisen from punitive drug control policies over the last decades: including (dis)proportionality of sentencing, discrimination on ethnic grounds, the death penalty, health, and gender disparities.

PRI will be at the UN Human Rights Council in June

PRI is co-organising two side-events at the forthcoming Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in June: one on girls in detention and another on human rights and corruption in detention.

Side-event details will be available on our website shortly.

ALTERNATIVES AND SENTENCING REFORM

PRI blog: Picking litter, planting ideas: addressing scepticism about community service in Kenya

One of the key stumbling blocks in many countries to increasing use of Community Service Orders (CSOs) by the courts is that local community doesn't back the initiative - or at least a perception that it doesn't. Research conducted recently for PRI by the Kenya National Crime Research Centre found that 63.6% of magistrates interviewed did not think that short prison sentences were a good way of dealing with petty offences, yet they continued to give them out. In fact, 93.9% of prisoners in the Meru region (4,526 of 4,819) were serving sentences of three years or below and therefore were eligible for a CSO.

One of the strategies of PRI's UKAID funded [ExTRA project \(Excellence in Training and Rehabilitation\)](#) is to tackle stakeholder perceptions - both within the judiciary and outside it. In this blog, Omar Khan, ExTRA project coordinator, visited the region and took part in a community open day run by the local probation office.



Other news and resources:

South Africa: [Interdepartmental issues add to prison overcrowding](#)

Costa Rica: [One Doctor For Every 5000 Inmates In Costa Rica's Overcrowded Prison System](#)

US: [Time to Get Serious About Criminal Justice Reform](#)

US: [Criminal justice reform ignores victims of crime. That makes no sense.](#)

US: [It's Hard To Say What Caused A Huge Drop In Crime, But It's Not Mass Incarceration](#)

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

[African Commission adopts landmark resolution on the right to rehabilitation for victims of torture](#)

In May, the African Commission adopted a resolution on the right to victims of torture to rehabilitation at its 56th session in Banjul, The Gambia. The resolution calls on state parties to the African Charter to implement domestic laws prohibiting torture and clear provisions on the obligation to provide rehabilitation to victims, including medical care, access to appropriate social rehabilitation and adequate compensation.

[Read the text of the resolution.](#)

[New report by US based Vera Institute challenging common misconceptions about solitary confinement and highlights where safe alternatives are being developed and used](#)

This new report by the Vera Institute addresses some of the common misconceptions about the use of solitary confinement / segregation (for example, that it makes jails safer, that it acts as a deterrent, and that it is only ever used on violent prisoners). It also challenges the idea that there are no safe or viable alternatives, highlighting some

emerging good practice in the USA.

Other news and resources:

Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture: The Association for the Prevention of Torture have produced [a handy timeline tracing the history of OPCAT](#) from conception to ratification by 77 state parties today.

Argentina: [Argentine guards jailed for life over fatal prison beating](#)

Bahrain: [Former Inmates at Bahrain's Jaw Prison Describe Being Tortured and Teargassed](#)

Central African Republic: [One UN peacekeeper's mission to improve prisons in Central African Republic](#)

China: [Tiger chairs and cell bosses: Police torture of criminal suspects in China](#)

Guatemala: [UN torture prevention body urges Guatemala to improve monitoring of places of detention](#)

Morocco: [Morocco accused of prison torture in Amnesty report](#)

Russia: [Inmates Slash Arms in Protest at Prison in Russia's Far East](#)

Scotland: [Prisoner to be awarded damages for use of 'disproportionate' restraint by G4S during hospital visits](#)

US: [Callous and cruel: the use of force against inmates with mental disabilities in US jails and prisons](#) – new Human Rights Watch report.

US: ['Prison guards can never be weak': the hidden PTSD crisis in America's jails](#)

DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION

PRI joins calls for a protocol to the African Charter on abolition of the death penalty

PRI along with Fiacat, FIDH and the Advocates for Human Rights [signed a statement urging the African Commission on Human and People's Rights](#) to adopt a protocol to the African Charter on the abolition of the death penalty under any circumstances. It is hoped that such a protocol would mobilise states and human rights organisations to push for the abolition of the death penalty all over Africa, as well as ensuring that states would not unilaterally reinstate the death penalty.

UN Secretary-General publishes report on the use of the death penalty

The UN Secretary-General's [quinquennial report](#) on capital punishment and implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty was tabled at 24th session of the Crime Commission in Vienna last month. The Quakers UN Office (QUNO) and PRI also co-organised a Q&A side-event with Professor William Schabas, who compiled the report. The event attracted a particularly high level of interest, with around 90 participants.

Other news and resources:

Papua New Guinea: [PNG confirms death penalty is 'under review'](#)

USA: [Nebraska Bans Death Penalty, Defying a Veto](#)

India: [ACHR report examines use of 'collective conscience' in death penalties](#)

Vietnam: [Many Vietnamese lawmakers back abolition of death penalty for 7 crimes](#)

PRE-TRIAL JUSTICE

[African Commission adopts Guidelines on the Conditions of Arrest, Police Custody and Pre-Trial Detention in Africa](#)

Three years in the making, these new Guidelines were adopted at the 56th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul in May, and detail the measures state parties ought to take to respect, defend, and promote the rights of criminal suspects.

See also, an [Open Society Foundations blog which welcomes Guidelines](#) but says the proof will be in the implementation.

WOMEN IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

[Sign up to our summer school for monitoring bodies on gender-sensitive monitoring](#)

PRI is co-organising a Summer School for members and staff of National Preventive Mechanisms on 'Preventing torture and ill-treatment of female detainees through gender-sensitive monitoring', based on the Bangkok Rules. It will take place from 10-13 August 2015 in Bristol, UK, and is co-organised with the University of Bristol, in partnership with the Association for the Prevention of Torture. It is sponsored by the Danish Government within the Convention against Torture Initiative.

See here for more information. To register, fill in this form and send to pkeeling@penalreform.org before 10 June.

[UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture's annual report highlights the elevated risk faced by women in prisons](#)

In its annual report, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (the SPT) references the particular risks of torture and ill-treatment faced by women in the criminal justice system, and says that gender-specific perspectives on torture in prisons have not been adequately discussed. The report also notes the high level of discrimination and violence

against the LGBTI community in prisons. The working group is currently drafting position papers on the relationship between discrimination and the prevention of torture, with a focus on women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

See also PRI's [Detention Monitoring Tool](#), in particular the [Guide to gender-sensitive monitoring](#) and [LGBTI persons deprived of their liberty: a framework for preventive monitoring](#)

Other news and resources:

Cambodia: [Cambodian human rights NGO, LICADHO has released a new report on mothers in prison](#). *Mothers behind bars* calls for the interests of dependent children to be taken into account when arresting, detaining and sentencing women, highlights the high and unnecessary rate of pre-trial detention in Cambodia, and the pressing need for non-custodial measures. The issue of pre-trial detention in Cambodia – around 63% of prisoners - was picked up in [a feature in the Phnom Penh Post](#).

Canada: [Poverty-related crimes are becoming 'life-sentences' for aboriginal women](#)

Tanzania: [Legal body offers free service to over 5 million women](#)

UK: [Violence up at Eastwood Park women's prison](#)

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