

February

Addressing human rights and systemic criminal justice reform in the Middle East and North Africa



There is scope for reform in many areas of criminal justice in the Middle East and North Africa. Non-custodial responses to offending are rarely used; there are few aftercare programmes or reintegration plans; prisons are generally overcrowded and lack the basic facilities and services needed to meet the needs of vulnerable groups.

Our three-year project, which started at the end of 2011, builds on work carried out over the past six years, also supported by SIDA, which focused on improving juvenile justice systems in the region. The current project

expanded the scope of previous work, and focuses on criminal justice reform for vulnerable groups, such as women, including in particular pregnant women, women with children, domestic workers and sex workers, and children and young people, including children detained with their mothers. It operates in six countries – Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen.

In February 2012, PRI's Middle East and North Africa office signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tunisian Ministry of Justice, one of several signed with government institutions and local NGOs this year to help deliver our project promoting the rights of vulnerable groups in the penal system in the MENA region, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).



Training workshop for prison staff, Morocco, 2012.



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Harsh conditions in prison have a greater impact on marginalised and vulnerable groups who, because of age, gender, ethnicity, state of health or legal status, usually face an increased risk to their safety, security, and well-being.

Over the course of the year, a number of activities aimed at improving the compliance of penitentiary systems with international standards took place in Algeria, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen and Morocco. These included legal research and analysis of the legislative system in each country; capacity-building workshops on a human rights based approach to prison management for prison personnel; exchange visits and reviews of good regional practices; curriculum development for police academies; and developing services for vulnerable groups, such as an aftercare scheme for prisoners after release in Jordan, for example.

The project has a particular focus on diverting vulnerable groups out of the criminal justice system and promoting the use of non-custodial measures. Regional research on the legal status of alternatives and their use is in progress, and a series of workshops for journalists and judges took place to promote the use of alternative sentences.

Another project objective is to enhance the capacity of local NGOs and encourage their engagement on criminal justice reform in the project countries. This year, PRI signed Memoranda of Understanding with several local NGOs to act as local partners in delivering the project activities in each country, and to help establish a regional network of NGOs that work on criminal justice reform.

Morocco

In Morocco, the main focus of the project in 2012 was providing specialised training for prison personnel. A series of workshops on human rights based prison management was organised in partnership with the General Commission for Prisons and Reintegration. Additionally, we worked closely with King Mohammad VI Foundation for Prisoners' Reintegration to document and share their experience of prisoner aftercare in the region.

Algeria

Over 1,000 women annually are imprisoned in Algeria, either in women's prisons or in separate wings of men's prisons. This year, an agreement was signed with the Directorate for Prison and Reintegration to support the establishment of a mother-and-baby unit at the women's prison in Algiers which meets international standards on the provision of childcare. The unit is expected to open at the end of 2013.

Egypt

In 2012, political events slowed the project's progress in Egypt. However, discussions are underway with local NGOs on how to take the project forward.

Tunisia

Since 2011, PRI has been able to work closely with the Tunisian Ministry of Justice. Amongst other activities this year, we have provided expertise in the drafting of a new penal reform strategy.

Jordan

The rate of recidivism in Jordan is 57 per cent, and former prisoners have little support after their release from prison to support their reintegration back into society. In partnership with government agencies and local NGOs, we are working to establish an aftercare scheme for prisoners on release. The scheme will be run by a network of local NGOs and with the support of the Ministry of Social Development.

Yemen

In Yemen, the prison system has a severe shortage of resources, conditions are poor, and prison personnel have little awareness of, or training in, prison management. We are working jointly with the Yemeni Correction and Rehabilitation Department to establish a specialist training centre for prison staff. The centre will, for example, offer training on prison management techniques, the needs of vulnerable groups and the provision of healthcare.

Morocco Algeria Tunisia Egypt Jordan Yemen

