



Ministerial Side Event in the margins of the General Assembly High-Level Debate on 'A second chance: Addressing the global prison challenge'

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: TRANSLATING UN STANDARDS ON PRISON AND OFFENDER MANAGEMENT INTO ACTION

13 JUNE 2025
1:15-2:30 PM EDT

UN Headquarters, New York, Conference Room 6
and streaming on UN Web-TV

Background

As part of fair, balanced and proportionate criminal justice responses to offending, well-managed prison systems are an integral aspect of the justice chain. Respecting human dignity in a safe, secure and rehabilitative custodial environment is a key component of the rule of law that advances community safety, human rights and sustainable development.¹ In support of the above and upon the recommendation of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), the General Assembly has adopted a growing body of UN standards and norms on prison management and the treatment of offenders² that provide universally recognized guidance to Member States.

Too often, however, expectations towards those services and individuals in charge of the custody of prisoners and actual realities in prison settings stand in stark contrast to each other. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the global prison population is on the rise again and has reached more than 11,5 million persons worldwide, out of which one third is held on remand. Prison overcrowding and its severe consequences continue to challenge a majority of Member States³, often coupled with poor conditions and resources constraints that undermine the ultimate purposes of a prison sentence, including the prevention of reoffending by advancing rehabilitation and social reintegration prospects.

In addition to persisting challenges, including as regards an enhanced use of non-custodial measures in appropriate cases, prison services in many countries are confronted with a diverse set of emerging concerns, ranging from their vulnerability to climate disruptions, an exposure to instability and conflict, the challenge of organized crime in prisons and a sharp rise in the number of women prisoner and other prisoners with specific needs. In recognition of the significant implications of the above, the CCPCJ, at its 34th session, recommended for adoption by the General Assembly a new resolution calling for continued action in the field of prison management and the treatment of offenders.⁴

¹ [United Nations System Common Position on Incarceration](#), 2021.

² Including, in particular, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ([the Nelson Mandela Rules](#)), the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Noncustodial Measures for Women Offenders ([the Bangkok Rules](#)), the UN Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures ([the Tokyo Rules](#)) as well as the forthcoming UN Model Strategies on Reducing Reoffending ([the Kyoto Model Strategies](#)).

³ UNODC, [Global prison population and trends](#), 2024.

⁴ [E/CN.15/2025/L.7/Rev.1](#) entitled "Celebrating the Bangkok Rules and the Nelson Mandela Rules: A call for continued action in the field of prison management and the treatment of offenders".

As the custodian of the UN standards and norms in this field, UNODC assists Member States worldwide in (i) reducing the scope of imprisonment; (ii) strengthening prison management and improving prison conditions; and in (iii) enhancing the social reintegration prospects of offenders. In commemoration of the 10th and 15th anniversaries of the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Bangkok Rules and in light of the forthcoming Kyoto Model Strategies, this side event presents a unique opportunity to showcase its respective technical assistance and collaboration with national counterparts across the globe, shed light on persisting and emerging prison challenges and to reiterate the need to firmly situate prison and penal reform within broader efforts to advance the rule of law.

Objective

- Showcase the impact of prison and penal reform initiatives pursued by UNODC, including through the lens of national counterparts and partners.
- Draw attention to both persisting and emerging prison challenges and contribute to enhanced awareness, preparedness and forward-looking action.
- Generate a renewed commitment and encourage investments aimed at advancing the practical application of the Nelson Mandela Rules, the Bangkok Rules and the Kyoto Model Strategies.
- Contribute to an enhanced understanding of the benefits of prison and penal reform and advocate for a multi-stakeholder engagement in the treatment of offenders.

Preliminary agenda

Opening remarks

- Ms. Ghada Waly, Executive Director, UNODC

Keynote remarks

- H.E. Dr. Pieter Groenewald, Minister of Correctional Services, South Africa
- H. E. Mr. Ayaz Baetov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers / Minister of Justice / Director of the National Institute of Strategic Initiatives of the Kyrgyz Republic
- H.E. Mr. Jose Antonio Zabalgoitia, Chair, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
- H.E. Mr. Vathayudh Vichankaiyakij, Deputy Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations
- H.E. Mr. Umetsu Shigeru, Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations

Panel Discussion

- Mr. Philipp Meissner, Inter-regional Advisor, Crime Prevention & Criminal Justice Section, UNODC
- Ms. Michelle Ann Lapuz, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Justice, The Philippines
- Ms. Patience Baffoe-Bonnie, Director General of the Ghana Prisons Service, Ministry of Interior, Ghana
- Mr. Rafael Pacheco, President, National Council of Secretaries of State of Justice, Citizenship, Human Rights and Penitentiary Administration / Secretary of Justice, Espírito Santo, Brazil

Q&A / Closing Remarks

Moderation: Ms. Delphine Schantz, Representative, New York Office, UNODC