The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners

1955 – Adoption of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners

2011 – The Nelson Mandela Rules

First United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
Geneva, 1955 – Adoption of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners

UNODC, as custodian of the Nelson Mandela Rules, is mandated to provide technical assistance to Member States in the field of penal reform.

In order to further enhance its technical assistance following the adoption of the Nelson Mandela Rules, a new Global Programme on Addressing Prison Challenges has been launched.

Mandate for revision
General Assembly, 2011

Review process
2011-2014

Consensus on all revisions
Cape Town, 2015

Endorsed and approved by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and the Economic and Social Council

Adoption by the General Assembly

Nelson Mandela
18 July
Nelson Mandela International Day

To honour the legacy of Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison, the rules are known as the Nelson Mandela Rules.

It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

Global Prison Challenges Programme

A large number of prison systems around the world are at a stage of crisis, with serious effects on prisoners, their families and societies as a whole. The ultimate purpose of imprisonment – the protection of society from crime – is undermined in prisons which are overstretched and poorly managed.

In our efforts to make societies more resilient to crime and to promote social cohesion…, we cannot disregard those in prison. We must remember that prisoners continue to be part of society, and must be treated with respect due to their inherent dignity as human beings.

Yury Fedotov, Executive Director, UNODC

“A crisis in prisons”

A crisis in prisons

Overview

Prison overcrowding

Continuous growth in prison populations and prison overcrowding

>100% of capacity

>120% of capacity

>150% of capacity


Focus areas

UNODC works with the technical assistance provided in the field to address the core challenges of prison overcrowding.

Core challenges

Uniform and unacceptable levels of imprisonment

Homes to enjoy safe, secure and humane conditions of imprisonment

To encourage, social and economic reintegration of prisoners

Incorporating effective, reasonable alternatives to imprisonment

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Yury Fedotov, Executive Director, UNODC

18 countries

>100% of capacity

115 countries

>100% of capacity

198 countries

>100% of capacity

>120% of capacity

>150% of capacity