



COMMUN VIII  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (UNGA)

PRISON REFORM

*Background Guide*

Authored by Co-Chairs Bella Wright '24 and Ben Summey '24

## INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

Thank you for choosing to be a delegate for this General Assembly on Prison Reform and Human Rights. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the main policy-making body of the United Nations, where member states meet in sessions, such as this one, to discuss international issues presented before the delegates. The purpose of this assembly is to discuss possible solutions to the many problems found within the global prison system.

This committee is run by two co-chairs. After overseeing the Vaccine Equity Committee at COMMUN VII, in which delegates discussed proposals to improve the equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines by contributing resources and collaborating with other countries, we decided to collaborate again and research another important issue to the world—the human rights of prisoners. As citizens of the United States, a country with an incredibly complex and controversial prison system, we wanted to learn more about how the American prison system compares to the rest of the world and the conditions experienced by prisoners internationally. While organizations such as Amnesty International describe how some countries fail to abide by international humanitarian law by misinforming prisoners, as well as mistreating prisoners through conducting unfair trials, arbitrary detention, torture, and more, prison systems in other areas of the world are praised by human rights groups.<sup>1</sup> Scandinavian countries like Norway and Denmark, in fact, have been praised by American and global institutions for their ability to rehabilitate prisoners and integrate them back into society as welcomed citizens, and have proven their success with the lowest recidivism rates in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

This committee does require a position paper to be submitted in order to be eligible for awards. We understand that international human rights can be difficult topic to research, so if you have any questions about our committee, please feel free to reach out at any time:

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We sincerely thank you for taking your time to research this issue and we look forward to seeing the solutions you bring to the table during the conference.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [Amnesty International](#)

<sup>2</sup> Source: [The Guardian](#)

## IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

The following words appear throughout this guide, and they're important for understanding prison reform as a whole. Here are the definitions to help guide you as you read forward:

- Recidivism rate: *Percentage of convicts who reoffend after a certain time period*
- Preventive detention: *Incarceration before trial in order to protect society from individuals assumed to be dangerous*
- Egalitarian: *Leaning towards equality*

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted on December 10, 1948. In this declaration, the United Nations outlined the basic rights and freedoms guaranteed to all.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the declaration, there are many rights specifically granted to prisoners or people accused of committing a crime by a state. As stated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), while articles 4 through 11 are meant to address these issues, the UDHR is not a legally binding document, meaning the United Nations cannot enforce or legally harm countries on the basis of violating these articles.<sup>4</sup>

“No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.” – *Article 9*

“All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.” – *Article 7*

“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” – *Article 5*

It is the goal of this committee to come to legally binding resolutions to reform the way prisoners are treated across the world in accordance with the UDHR.

## CASE STUDY I: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PRISON SYSTEM

After 1865, when the 13th amendment was ratified, the former Confederate states faced a financial crisis. The Civil War had left the South in shambles and the country as a whole had lost one of its most lucrative economic systems—slavery. Prior to their emancipation, enslaved people created a lot of wealth for the United States. The approximate value of the 4 million enslaved people in 1860 was 3.5 billion dollars, which was “more than all manufacturing and railroads combined.”<sup>5</sup> After their emancipation, the South looked for new ways to recreate this “free” labor. A newly lucrative prison system thus sprouted from a clarification in the 13th amendment, which stated that “[n]either slavery nor

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<sup>3</sup> Source: [United Nations](#)

<sup>4</sup> Source: [OHCHR via United Nations](#)

<sup>5</sup> Source: [Yale](#)

involuntary servitude, [shall exist in the U.S.] except as a punishment for crime,” meaning that imprisoned people could be still used for their “free” labor.

This was a new economic incentive for criminalization. Laws were created to criminalize people, especially Black people, for things as simple as “having no lawful employment,” or for owning a firearm.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Mississippi Black Codes were laws that criminalized Black people after slavery ended in order to incarcerate them for their free labor. Once these laws were enacted, prison rates increased substantially.<sup>7</sup> Prisoners were unpaid and working conditions were deadly. According to D.A. Novak in *The Wheel of Servitude: Black Forced Labor After Slavery*, the death rate of prisoners working for railroad companies “between 1877 and 1879 was 45 percent in South Carolina, 25 percent in Arkansas, and 16 percent in Mississippi.” In an 1871 case regarding whether or not state prisons leasing their prisoners’ labor to corporations for profit was equitable, the Virginia Supreme Court declared that incarcerated people were indeed “slaves of the state.”<sup>8</sup>

We can frame our understanding of the United States’ current prison system with the background knowledge that slavery has historically been economically profitable for the United States. This knowledge might add to our understanding of why changing the system has been so difficult for reformers and abolitionists.

#### FEDERAL/STATE PRISONS VS. PRIVATE PRISONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Companies can profit from owning prisons by making contracts with local or federal governments in which they agree to manage a prison in return for money from the state. These companies make a profit by managing the prisons (for this money from the state) and by leasing their prisoners’ free labor to other companies (also for a fee). Although the privatization of prisons existed before slavery ended, it was only long after that its popularity exploded. Many argue that the rise in private prisons began as a response to federal prisons being overcrowded. Therefore, whenever we see a spike in criminalization, it comes with an increase in prison privatization.

As might be expected, federal prisons house people convicted of federal crimes, whereas state prisons house people convicted of state crimes. Federal prisons are generally higher security and are considered safer to be in.

The very founding of the United States’ federal (as opposed to state) prison system was a reflection of the country’s philosophy of justice for the incarcerated. The first federal prison in the U.S. was built at Leavenworth, Kansas in 1906 (prior to this, prisoners were incarcerated at a state level, meaning law enforcement and incarceration was generally left up to the states), and the facility was built by prisoners. Since then, many federal/state and private prisons require prisoners, if physically able, to work. The ACLU stated that in 2020, prison labor produced “more than \$2 billion in goods and more than \$9 billion in services” for prison maintenance, and additionally that “[m]ore than 80 percent of prison laborers do prison maintenance work” in the United States.<sup>9</sup> The difference is that the companies that manage private prisons make a profit from the labor of the prison workers, whereas federal and state prisons are owned by the government and do not operate for profit.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: [Mississippi Black Codes via American Yawp](#)

<sup>7</sup> Source: [Vera Institute](#)

<sup>8</sup> Source: [Ruffin v. Commonwealth via Office of Justice Programs](#)

<sup>9</sup> Source: [ACLU](#)

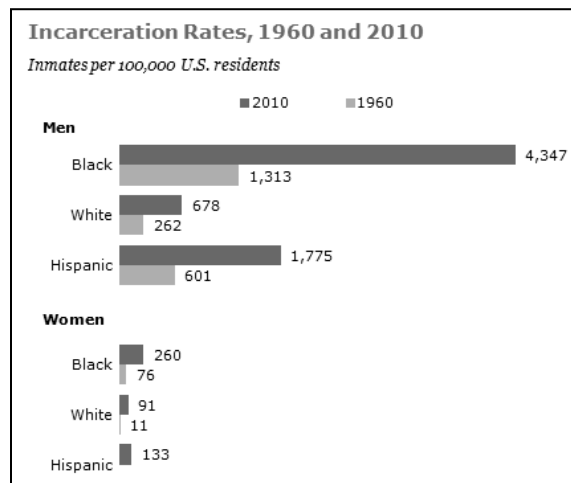
## THE “WAR ON DRUGS”: A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The most significant rise of private prisons started in the 1970s with the “War on Drugs”, which was, simply put, a national effort in the United States to decrease illegal drug use by greatly increasing punishment for it. By increasing police presence in low income neighborhoods, the “War on Drugs” led to an exponential increase in arrests and incarceration rates. It began with what former president Lyndon B. Johnson called the “War on Crime,” which stemmed from his “War on Poverty,”<sup>10</sup> where police presence in urban centers was increased in hopes of decreasing the growing violent crime rate. It is important to note that these urban centers were largely populated by Black people, the demographic most highly targeted in the years to follow.

During the Vietnam War, from 1961 to 1968, the prison population was at an all-time low for the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>11</sup> After the war, however, incarceration rates reached levels never before seen in American history. In 1970, the U.S. prison population was about 200,000. In the next 15 years, it grew to about 500,000.<sup>12</sup> This staggering increase shook the nation's federal prisons, overcrowding them and depleting them of what few resources they had initially provided to prisoners.

### WHO MAKES UP THE PRISON POPULATION?

As shown in the graph below, which represents the incarceration rates of Black, White, and Hispanic incarcerated people, incarceration rates for Black men and women are significantly higher than those of White men and women.<sup>13</sup> A 2020 study on police gentrification showed that “[a]n increase in a neighborhood’s White population was not related to increased 911 calls to police and was associated with fewer street stops and proactive arrests,” meaning that many White neighborhoods have less active police forces than those in minority neighborhoods.<sup>14</sup> As was discussed in the section on the “War on Drugs,” “low-income and minority neighborhoods are often subject to heavy police patrol,” which contributes to the incarceration statistics in the chart to the right.<sup>15</sup> Because police presence varies between neighborhoods with different demographics, the prison population is not entirely correlated with actual crime rates.



<sup>10</sup> War on drugs, war on poverty, war on crime. Lots of things were named war back then.

<sup>11</sup> This happens with most wars with American involvement, as the potential offenders get drafted

<sup>12</sup> Source: [Bureau of Justice Statistics via Office of Justice Programs](#)

<sup>13</sup> Source: [Bureau of Justice Statistics via Office of Justice Programs](#)

<sup>14</sup> Source: [Urban Institute Initiative](#)

<sup>15</sup> Source: [The Atlantic](#)

## CASE STUDY II: A HISTORY OF THE NORWEGIAN PRISON SYSTEM

In the first half of the 20th century, Norway was poorer than most other European countries. Because of this, Norwegian policymakers had little choice but to embrace a laissez-faire approach to aid, only “tak[ing] care of the elderly, impoverished and indigent [only] ‘if utter impoverishment threatened.’”<sup>16</sup> From about 1895-1905, Norwegian prisons “were run very much like their American counterparts”<sup>17</sup> and recidivism rates were nearly 70 percent (roughly equal to modern America’s recidivism rate of 76.6 percent after 5 years, one of the highest in the world).<sup>18</sup> In 1902, however, per new legislation, Norway banned the death penalty and enacted the first in a series of significant prison reforms.

When the Norwegian Labor Party formed and gained political power around 1945, they stated that their goal was a “socialist Norway” in which the majority of the population would have the right to “work, leisure, education and gender equality.” These goals came first in the form of welfare reforms which lowered Norway’s unemployment rate to 2 percent (about the international average for the post-WWII period). During this period, political leaders were focused on the rehabilitation of the country, but prisons were neglected and generally remained stagnant; it was thought that increasing Norway’s standard of living would lower crime rates per se. Norway’s defining rehabilitative carceral system only started to develop in the latter half of the 20th century, with significant reforms centralized around the “prevailing notion that . . . rehabilitation was a moral, sensible, and cost-effective course of action.” The following reforms were made in this period:

- Those under 15 could no longer be imprisoned
- Theft and debt were no longer punished by imprisonment
- Most preventive detention was abolished
- Life imprisonment was abolished

In the 1990s, Norway’s egalitarian approach to incarceration began to decline due to the Conservative party gaining power. Many prisons that were previously state-run were bought by private companies, and increasingly punitive laws were instated, in part because of increased immigration—a member of the party in power at the time said that “foreign criminals are a big problem, and mild sentences and high-quality facilities aren’t helping.” This meant that between 2000 and 2012, the incarceration rate rose by 25 percent. This rise was “generated by the court system,” not because of an actual increase in crime.<sup>19</sup> In 2012, incarceration rates dipped down to the level that Norway maintains today.

### THE MODERN NORWEGIAN SYSTEM

Since the 1940s, Norway has granted its citizens universal healthcare, education, and retirement money. Because of this, the wealth gap is significantly smaller than in most countries without these policies, and therefore “certain motives to commit crime, such as hunger and desperate need” are

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<sup>16</sup> Source: [Excerpt from \*Prisons of Labor\*..., Victor L. Shammass, p. 60](#)

<sup>17</sup> Source: [University of California San Francisco Magazine](#)

<sup>18</sup> Source: [Harvard Political Review](#)

<sup>19</sup> Source: [Excerpt from \*Prisons of Labor\*..., Victor L. Shammass, p. 72](#)

eliminated.<sup>20</sup> Norway's recidivism rate is about 20 percent after 5 years, which can be compared to the United States' 76 percent, or the U.K.'s 72 percent. This low rate may also be attributed to Norway's focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment through what they call "restorative justice," meaning that the goals of incarceration are to "prevent the commission of new criminal acts, [to] reassure society, and ... [to] ensure satisfactory conditions for the prisoners."<sup>21</sup>

One of the goals of Norway's prison system is to mimic life outside prison as accurately as possible, so that convicts are able to reintegrate into society once they're released. This is implemented in part through architecture, with intentionally dorm-like cells and in some cases "open" style cells. In Norway's maximum security prison, Halden, each prisoner has a personal bathroom, fridge, TV and access to community space, as well as access to yoga classes. Overall, Norway's low recidivism rates may be attributed to a combination of prison-specific reforms; general socio-economic conditions and reforms; and a relatively rich, homogenous, and small population to begin with.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

While reading the country positions below, performing your own research, and writing your position paper, consider the following questions as tools to understand your country's stances and where you'll find common ground with other delegates.

- What role does prison play in society? What is the goal of prison?
- How can countries collaborate on global strategies to improve conditions for incarcerated people?
- How much control should an international body, such as the UN, have over individual nations' prison systems?
- How can countries learn from others' systems to reform their own?
- How can countries be incentivized to maintain human rights in their prisons?
- What policies contribute to community safety? What effects do a country's demographics have on the effectiveness of these policies?
- What is the connection between a country's economic type (capitalism, welfare capitalism, socialist democracy, socialism, communism, etc.) and its prison system?
- Should countries increase the use of prison alternatives? What are these alternatives?
- How can poorer countries get the resources necessary to reform their prisons?

### ADDITIONAL COUNTRY POSITIONS

Besides the American and Norwegian prison systems, countries across the world approach incarceration in many different ways, varying in how much emphasis they place on rehabilitation versus keeping incarcerated people from re-entering society at large again.

#### GERMANY

The stated focus of German prisons is to rehabilitate the people they incarcerate, and allow them to reenter German society without recidivism. Gero Meinen, director of the Berlin Ministry of Justice says

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<sup>20</sup> Source: [Emory Law](#)

<sup>21</sup> Source: [Norwegian Correctional Service \(Kriminalmsorgen\)](#)

that the objective of their system is “to enable prisoners to lead a life of social responsibility upon release.”<sup>22</sup> In 1977, German legislators passed the Prison Act, requiring prisons to make “life in corrections ... mirror as much as possible general living conditions outside prison.”<sup>23</sup> Germany also takes advantage of alternatives to prison sentences and attempts to shorten the lengths incarcerated people must serve in German prisons, which also provides a financial benefit to the German government. Approximately 80 percent of all criminal sentences in Germany are dealt with by leveling a fine, rather than spending time behind bars. Even if someone is incarcerated, the maximum prison sentence in Germany is fifteen years, unless they are deemed truly unfit to re-enter society at that period by prison staff. Inside German prisons, incarcerated people live in rooms with standard beds rather than cells. They enjoy many privileges of non-incarcerated citizens, such as freely wearing clothes or obtaining an education, and are paid for their work, as well as being required by the German prison system to save money to ensure they can re-enter society with a reasonable amount. German staff and officers in prisons are “drawn primarily from the ranks of lawyers, social workers, and mental health professionals,” providing a “therapeutic culture between staff and offenders.” There are no security cameras, little violence, and a maximum time of eight hours of solitary confinement in German prisons. Daniel Malloy, governor of Connecticut, has drawn inspiration from these German prison strategies to improve the quality of life among incarcerated people in Connecticut prisons and lower recidivism, and it has worked—the recidivism rate and prison population have been decreasing in rates similar to German prisons and lower than the average in the United States.<sup>24</sup>

## CHINA

Chinese prisons more closely resemble the American system than either the German or Norwegian. China’s official Judiciary statement claims that:

“[p]risons punish criminals because, without punishment, it is difficult for criminals to come to grips with their crimes and begin their life anew. While punishment focuses on enforcement, reform focuses on transformation. Punishment is the means, while transformation is the end. The purpose of punishment is to transform criminals into law-abiding citizens. This is precisely what criminal penalties are for. Prisons do not punish criminals for punishment’s sake.”<sup>25</sup>

According to the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), “almost every prisoner in the People’s Republic of China had to or still has to suffer [some form of abuse or torture].”<sup>26</sup> Chinese prisons are very strict and impose dehumanizing rules on its incarcerated population, regularly silencing and detaining human rights workers and other protestors against the Chinese prison system, and the United Nations Office on Human Rights has denounced these methods of imprisonment by the Chinese government.<sup>27</sup> Like the United States, a large financial incentive for China’s harsh treatment of incarcerated people and torture is forced labor or labor without pay, generating a large amount of income for the Chinese economy. Called *lǎogǎi* (劳改, lit. “reform through labor”), China uses its incarcerated

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<sup>22</sup> Source: [The John Howard Society of Canada](#)

<sup>23</sup> Source: [Office of Justice Programs](#)

<sup>24</sup> Source: [Deutsche Welle](#)

<sup>25</sup> Source: [China’s Judiciary via china.org.cn](#)

<sup>26</sup> Source: [International Society for Human Rights](#)

<sup>27</sup> Source: [OHCHR via United Nations](#)



population to create products for domestic sale and exports to foreign countries, including the United States. Since the 1990s, prisoners have attempted to attach cards to the products they create, warning of the harsh conditions in Chinese prisons, the terrors of láogǎi, and calling for human rights organizations to act. While countries such as the United States have passed legislation forbidding imports from láogǎi camps, Chinese officials have often found loopholes around these bans.<sup>28</sup> A 1988 approximation of “the total value of goods produced by non-labor re-education prisoners” equated to nearly \$1.5 billion according to China.<sup>29</sup>

## THE PHILIPPINES

Prisons in the Philippines have been consistently described by the international community as overcrowded and its prison system as corrupt. Since the 2016 election of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, his campaign for “a deadly war on drug trafficking” and encouragement of “extrajudicial executions” has caused brutal police violence, leading Amnesty International to denounce his “assassin”-like judicial state and call his actions a “war against the poor” for their disproportionate effects on lower-income Filipino citizens. In contrast to prison conditions in countries like Norway and Germany, prisons in the Philippines are heavily overpopulated, incarcerated people often being forced to sleep on the floor rather than beds. The prisoners also receive few to none of the rights afforded to incarcerated people in Norway or Germany. In addition to the harsh conditions of the prisons, they are also dangerously understaffed, leading to corruption among officers, who often share “management of primary facilities ... with gangs, creating a climate of violence.”

## RUSSIA

Russia has the highest prisoners to population ratio in Europe, necessitating an intricate network for its prison systems. This number has been decreasing in recent years, though, and is now among the lowest in the country’s history.<sup>30</sup> Russia’s judicial system imposes strict punishment for people convicted in their courts, with only 0.4 percent of court rulings resulting in acquittal. Unlike the penitentiary systems used elsewhere, Russian prisoners are placed into “penal colonies,” described by Ruth Maclean of the *New York Times* as the “descendants of gulags, the notorious Stalin-era labor camps where millions of Russians lost their lives.”<sup>31</sup> These penal colonies, while having improved conditions from the Soviet Union, are still very strict—prisoners are often brutalized, and forced to work in conditions similar to the United States, with Russia itself profiting massively from its prison labor. According to the Warsaw Centre for Eastern Studies, between 25 and 40 percent of Russian prisoners performed paid work during their sentence but 75 percent of these earned wages were used to pay for room and board in the penal colonies. Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch,<sup>32</sup> have also described the repressive conditions journalists and free speech activists face in Russia. Thousands of prosecution cases and murders have been linked to journalists in Russia, and a committee expert for the

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<sup>28</sup> Source: [National Public Radio \(NPR\)](#)

<sup>29</sup> Source: [Office of Justice Programs](#)

<sup>30</sup> Source: [Warsaw Centre for Eastern Studies](#)

<sup>31</sup> Source: [The New York Times](#)

<sup>32</sup> Source: [Human Rights Watch](#)

OHCHR described the consistently inadequate responses from the Russian government to investigate these violations and abuses.<sup>33</sup>

## RWANDA

Rwanda's prisons are overcrowded, operating at 174 percent capacity, and are also incredibly repressive to journalists. Conditions have been described as some of the worst in the world. Rwandan prisoners are often tortured and forced to comply with the demands of the authorities. Requests for medical attention and sufficient food are often denied by correctional officers and prisoners are unable to regularly contact the outside world.<sup>34</sup>

## DENMARK

The Danish prison system, like Norway, is focused on rehabilitation. Prisoners attend classes to learn while incarcerated, work a standard work week of 37 hours, and perform their own cooking and shopping activities. This has been correlated with a low rate of recidivism in Denmark, and prisoners are consistently able to return to their lives before their incarceration. Like Norway and Germany, sentences are also considerably shorter than in countries with prison systems focused on punishment.<sup>35</sup> Despite rare violence among prisoners and effective solutions to incidents, Danish prisons have been criticized for imposing harsh solitary confinement sentences and for nearly 40 percent of prisoners not being ethnically Danish, despite non-ethnic Danes making up less than 14 percent of Denmark's population.<sup>36</sup>

## BRAZIL

Prisons in Brazil are prone to deadly riots and violence is very common among prisoners, who are only further instigated by officers and the government.<sup>37</sup> Former president Jair Bolsonaro took heavy measures to crack down on illegal activity in the country, which led to an increase in Brazil's prison population and harsher conditions for them.<sup>38</sup> Officers and guards often lack adequate training, leading to extreme measures and human rights abuses.<sup>39</sup> The Wilson Center reports disparities between state and federal prisons, with federal prisons having better conditions, but only making up 0.1 percent of Brazil's incarcerated population. The cost per prisoner in state prisons is around R\$3,000 (about \$580 USD) less than in federal prisons, encouraging a higher sentencing rate for incarcerated people to state prisons.<sup>40</sup>

## INDIA

Conditions in Indian prisons are very harsh. India has a specific class system within its prisons, delegating special privileges to prisoners of middle and upper-class status, regardless of the crimes they

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<sup>33</sup> Source: [OHCHR via United Nations](#)

<sup>34</sup> Source: [Human Rights Watch](#)

<sup>35</sup> Source: [Berkeley Center via Georgetown University](#)

<sup>36</sup> Source: [The Washington Post](#)

<sup>37</sup> Source: [OHCHR via United Nations](#)

<sup>38</sup> Source: [The Washington Post](#)

<sup>39</sup> Source: [Human Rights Watch](#)

<sup>40</sup> Source: [The Wilson Center](#)

were convicted for. Indian prison officials additionally conceal the results of prisoner deaths, making it difficult for human rights organizations to classify violations and abuses.<sup>41</sup> Anecdotal cases heard by organizations like Human Rights Watch effectively demonstrate the torture of inmates, but officials go to great lengths to ensure the perception of prison conditions and improvement is positive.<sup>42</sup>

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

According to the federal government, the prison systems in Trinidad and Tobago are meant to highlight restorative justice and rehabilitation. A five-step program based on protection, correction, relation, reintegration into society, and restoration by reducing crime was implemented in 2007, and officials were meant to directly shift away from the old system built around retribution and punishment.<sup>43</sup> In its efforts for reintegration, the government creates opportunities for incarcerated people to create art and engage with the community. Infrastructure upgrades are also consistently made to improve conditions in prisons. The Minister of National Security Stuart Young promoted the idea that, “offenders require help to take responsibility for their actions and move forward with their lives,” and that improving rehabilitative conditions is the only progressive way to prevent recidivism.<sup>44</sup>

## SOUTH AFRICA

Prison conditions in South Africa have improved dramatically from the apartheid era, but still remain inadequate for its general prison population. Prisoners often experience physical and psychological abuse but this is underreported. In fact, abuse is considered a “part of the punishment,” which the organization Safer Spaces of South Africa describes as a “vindictive and reactionary response to crime [that] negates legitimate and dignified forms of punishment.”<sup>45</sup> Similar to many other countries, South African prisons are overcrowded and facilities are not kept well-funded or clean. In contrast to rehabilitative prison systems, guards and officers emphasize punishing the prisoners, and incidents of brutality are common.<sup>46</sup>

## UNITED KINGDOM

The UK, like many other Western-aligned nations, purports to focus on rehabilitation and reducing recidivism through various programs within its prisons and upon reentry into society. Its prison population has, in recent years, increased, however, and it is now faced with significant funding and overcrowding challenges, partially due to its relatively high arrest and incarceration rates

## MEXICO

Mexican prisons are often plagued by gang violence, corruption, and funding challenges. While the situation remains dire for many prisoners, the government has shown some interest in reform, and

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<sup>41</sup> Source: [Human Rights Watch](#)

<sup>42</sup> Source: [Office of Justice Programs](#)

<sup>43</sup> Source: [Trinidad & Tobago Prison Service](#)

<sup>44</sup> Source: [Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago](#)

<sup>45</sup> Source: [Safer Spaces of South Africa](#)

<sup>46</sup> Source: [Office of Justice Programs](#)

may be interested in holistic legislation that addresses the systemic issues of inequality, immigration, and violence vis-à-vis incarceration.

#### TURKEY

Geopolitically, Turkey straddles the line between East and West, and its prison system is no different: at times embracing prison reform, at times sticking with punitive enforcement and harsh penalties. As the delegate from Turkey, you will have to navigate these conflicts, determining where the future of Turkey and its judicial system lie.

#### JAPAN

Of any country represented in this committee, Japan's prison system is perhaps the most anomalous. Prisons focus heavily on rehabilitation, leading to low recidivism rates. Yet, discipline is also harsh, and prisoners' structured schedules give little room for individuality. This, on top of a criminal justice system that is famously pro-prosecutor, convicting 99% of those accused in criminal cases. Is Japan's prison system a possible middle-ground between rehabilitation and retribution, or another system in need of reform?

#### IRAN

Human rights groups have accused Iran of abuse throughout its prison system. While educated urban Iranian youth may oppose these conditions, it's important to remember that a significant share of the population supports Iran's harsh policies and Sharia law, and would see concessions to the West as a betrayal.

#### ICELAND

Iceland, like other Nordic countries, focuses its efforts on rehabilitation, and has a low incarceration rate to begin with. A major question is whether these policies will be successful in nations poorer, larger, and more heterogeneous than Iceland.

#### KENYA

Kenya's prison system is officially focused on rehabilitation, but lack of funding has led to a punitive reality. In order to bring its system in-line with its judicial philosophy, Kenya must either find new, low-cost methods of rehabilitation, or receive funding from either foreign or domestic sources.

#### THAILAND

Thailand's prison system faces hurdles similar to many other nations': overcrowding, lack of funding, allegations of human rights abuses, etc. One method used by Thailand to reduce these burdens is alternative sentencing, where convicts perform community service or are put on probation instead of being jailed.

#### CHILE, FRANCE, ARGENTINA

Although occupying vastly different geographic, economic, and political spheres, the above countries have been grouped to highlight the similarities between their prison systems: All three are relatively wealthy nations, all have faced criticism for their prison systems, and all have made some attempt to reform their prison systems, to varying success. As a delegate from Chile, France, or Argentina, you are uniquely suited to either aid or be aided by other nations.

#### UKRAINE

Ukrainian prisons have been accused of torture, poor health conditions, and denying *habeas corpus*. As Ukraine seeks support from the West in its ongoing war and attempts to shape itself in the mold of Western democracies, its prison systems will require major reform.

#### ALBANIA

In addition to the many concerns enumerated above—prison overcrowding, underfunding, etc.—Albania also has deep-rooted problems with organized crime, corruption, and brutal eye-for-an-eye blood feuds. Is the solution a crack-down on crime, or a move to rehabilitative justice?