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PRISON CONDITIONS

Department of Correctional Services ‘understaffed’: The New Age reported that the Public Service Association (PSA), a trade union, has called on the Department of Correctional Services to employ an additional 23 000 staff members in order to be able to deal effectively with rehabilitation security. The report noted that the PSA stated that the prisons were ‘hopelessly understaffed’ and that this has a serious impact on the safety of prisoners and officials. Reported by Siyabonga Mkhwanazi, 16 April 2013, at http://www.thenewage.co.za/92179-1007-53-PSA_asks_prisons_department_for_more_staff.

SENTENCING AND PAROLE

Offenders contribute to community: The New Age reported that 17 offenders offered their services at uMzwilili Junior Primary School in Umlazi, where the body of an eight-year-old girl was found one week after she was raped and murdered. The offenders, who are parolees and probationers, are assisting with the cutting of grass and trees, clearing the bush and cleaning the school yard. Reported by Canaan Mdletshe, 23 April 2013, at http://www.thenewage.co.za/93081-1008-53-Prison_offenders_help_schools

CORRUPTION AND GOVERNANCE

Court rules in unfair dismissal dispute: The New Age reported that the Supreme Court of Appeal found that the Department of Correctional Services had been incorrect in ordering prison officials to cut their dreadlocks and dismissing them for failing to do so in 2007. A Rastafarian and two trainee sangomas were working as officials at Pollsmoor Prison when they were dismissed for refusing to alter their hair. Reported by Dudu Dube, 1 April 2013, at http://www.thenewage.co.za/89870-1007-53-Court_rules_in_favour_of_Rastas

Renaming of prisons: The Citizen reported that President Zuma officially renamed the Pretoria Central Prison Kgosi Mampuru II Management Area on 10 April 2013. Kgosi Mampuru was hanged in Pretoria Prison on 22 November 1883 after having been convicted of public violence. The Minister of Correctional Services reportedly issued a statement saying that “the renaming of correctional centres must assist in transforming places of incarceration to centres of hope and second chances.” Reported by The Citizen, 11 April 2013, at <http://www.citizen.co.za/citizen/content/en/citizen/local-news?oid=414434&sn=Detail&pid=334&Prisons-renamed-to-invoke-hope>

REHABILITATION

Offenders assist disabled man: The New Age reported that a group of prisoners, under the guidance of skilled artisans and technicians, renovated the home of a wheelchair-bound man, Christopher Bekisi, who is paralysed from the neck down. The prisoners reportedly removed large amounts of rubble from Bekisi’s home, bought material to refurbish the home and painted and fixed the ceiling. Reported by Sandiso Phaliso, 30 April 2013, at http://www.thenewage.co.za/94170-1008-53-Inmates_help_disabled_man

OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Secret prison accessed: Al Jazeera obtained footage of Bossembele prison, reportedly one of “Africa’s most secretive prisons,” where ousted President Bozize allegedly had his political opponents detained and tortured. Video footage shows the remains of the prison and describes the conditions in which detainees were kept. Reported by Al Jazeera, 11 April 2013, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/africa/2013/04/201341151513523414.html>

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

ICRC describes poor conditions of detention: Jeune Afrique reported that the ICRC condemned the extremely poor state of prisons in the DRC, highlighting severe overcrowding (up to 725%), dilapidated structures, limited access to food and healthcare, torture and increasing deaths in custody. It identified several causes to this situation, including a slow criminal justice system and an inefficient administration. Original report in French. Report by Trésor Kibangula, 25 April 2013, at <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130425145902/rd-congo-kinshasa-cicr-croix-rougeprisons-en-rdc-des-conditions-de-detention-jugees-catastrophiques-par-le-cicr.html>

ETHIOPIA

Detained journalist transferred: New Business Ethiopia reported that the Committee to Protect Journalists (CJP) has protested against the transfer of the editor of an independent newspaper, Woubshet Taye, to a remote prison several hours away from his family’s home. A spokesperson for the CJP stated that “moving detainees to prisons far from their families is a tactic long used by governments that wish to not only further penalize the individuals but to punish their loved ones as well.” Taye has been imprisoned since June 2011 on charges of terrorism. Reported by allAfrica.com 22 April 2013, at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201304230349.html>

GHANA

Government accepts abolishment of death penalty: Business Ghana reported that Amnesty International Ghana has commended the government for accepting the recommendation to abolish the death penalty in the revised constitution. The spokesperson for Amnesty International reportedly stated that the government should take “urgent action to implement the recommendation as the continuous retention of the death penalty clause in the constitution means it could still be used. The total number of prisoners on death row is currently 166, 162 men and 4 women. Reported by Business Ghana, 23 April 2013, at http://www.businessghana.com/portal/news/index.php?op=getNews&news_cat_id=1&id=182328

LIBERIA

Justice system functioning poorly: allAfrica.com reported that despite purported reforms to the Liberian justice system and the assistance of the United Nations, the country’s justice system ‘continues to take a downward trend.’ At the start of a three-day National Criminal Justice Conference in Monrovia, Acting Chief Justice Korkpor reportedly noted that the number of pre-trial detainees continues to remain high despite the introduction of a number programmes aimed at promoting more efficient criminal processes. Reported by allAfrica.com, 1 April 2013, at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201304010948.html>

LIBYA

Inmates escape from prison: Zee News reported that approximately 150 illegal immigrants escaped from a Libyan prison in Gharyan city on 24 April 2013. The detainees reportedly exploited poor weather conditions and attacked prison officials, leaving three officials wounded. The report notes that the prison officials simply “do not have sufficient security equipment.” Reported by Zee News, 25 April 2013, at http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/libya-jailbreak-150-african-immigrants-flee-prison_844743.html

MALAWI

Challenges in prisons relating to tuberculosis: Nyasa Times reported that members of the National Tuberculosis Control Program toured Chichiri and Zomba Maximum Security Prisons in an effort to identify challenges relating to TB control efforts in Malawi’s Prisons. The report notes that TB spreads particularly fast in Malawian prisons due to extreme overcrowding and a lack of proper isolation cells for prisoners with TB and those who are weak due to other conditions including HIV. Reported by Nyasa Times, 3 April 2013, at <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/04/03/tb-prevalence-rate-high-in-malawi-prisons-lack-of-isolation-cells/>

Poor conditions of detention: Nyasa Times reported that a report on Malawian prisons by the Human Rights Commission for the period between December 2011- March 2012 revealed that 79 prisoners died during that period. The main causes of death were attributed to injuries sustained as a result of police brutality and the contraction of communicable diseases as a result of overcrowding. The Prisons Inspectorate reportedly stated in response to the report that “there is need to construct more jails to reduce overcrowding in prisons.” Reported by Nyasa Times, 30 April 2013, at <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/04/30/malawi-prison-conditions-still-worse-79-inmates-die-due-to-crowding-police-brutality-report/>

MALI

Detainees tortured: Human Rights Watch has reported that Malian soldiers are guilty of having tortured a number of suspected supporters of Islamist armed groups near Timbuktu between 15 February 2013 and March 4 2013, two of which subsequently died. The report notes that the victims of the soldiers’ brutality showed signs of having been beaten, kicked, burned and injected with a caustic substance. Human Rights Watch has called on the government to investigate the allegations against the Malian soldiers as a matter of urgency. Reported by Human Rights Watch, 11 April 2012, at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/11/mali-two-torture-victims-die-detention> also reported at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22107625> and <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97845/Torture-beatings-and-death-for-detained-Malians>

MOROCCO

Increase in prison population: Yabiladi reported on the Moroccan Prison Observatory’s annual report, which found that most Moroccan prisons were severely overcrowded and that nationally, the monthly inmate intake stood at 1000. Its report contains several recommendations to reduce the prison population. Original report in French. Report by Mohammed Jaoubouk, 5 April 2013, at <http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/16505/prisons-maroc-1000-nouveaux-detenus.html>

NIGERIA

Chief Judge urges inmates to study: The Tribune reported that the Lagos Chief State Judge delivered a statement via his registrar who attended the launching of an education facility at a Lagos prison. The Chief Judge’s statement encouraged prison inmates to sit for the national examinations whilst serving sentences of imprisonment so as to further their chances of employment on release. Reported by Solarin Moyosore, 3 April 2013, at <http://tribune.com.ng/news2013/index.php/en/news/item/8800-lagos-cj-urges-prisoners-to-sit-for-wassce-utme>

Widespread abuse of right to liberty: allAfrica.com reported that according to a United States country human rights report, Nigerian prisons currently hold an estimated 6000 children and minors. Many of these children were reportedly born inside prison but are compelled to remain in prison despite their being a government order directing their release. The report also notes that police generally operated with impunity and that authorities did not investigate the majority of cases of police abuse or hold police accountable for the use of excessive or deadly force or for the deaths of persons in custody. Reported by Ini Ekott, 22 April 2013, at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201304220368.html>

SENEGAL

Amended criminal code discussed: Soleil reported that the Senegalese Commission for Criminal Law Reform and OSIWA organised a 3-day seminar aimed at validating proposed changes to the country’s Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. The new legislation should modernise the current legal framework and better reflect the content of international conventions ratified by the country. Original report in French. Report by S. Diam Sy, 3 April 2013, available at http://www.lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27528:vers-une-reforme-profonde-du-code-penal-et-du-code-de-procedure-penale&catid=59:house-design&Itemid=108

UGANDA

Mobile courts introduced: The United Nations Refugee Agency reported on its recent launching of a pilot mobile court scheme with the aim of improving access to justice for refugees who have been victims of crime at the Nakivale settlement. It is hoped that the project will serve 68 000 refugees by providing them with quicker access to justice and legal assistance. Reported by The United Nations Refugee Agency, 16 April 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/516d29359.html>

Prisons’ Act to be amended: New Vision reported that the Uganda Law Reform Commission (ULRC) is set to amend the Prisons’ Act, to among other things, reflect the current situation and public demands, including availing conjugal rights for inmates. Other amendments will reportedly include the repeal of life imprisonment provisions. Reported by Henry Sekanjako, 29 April 2013, at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/642133-inmates-will-soon-enjoy-conjugal-rights.html>

ZAMBIA

Shortage of kitchen equipment: The Lusaka Times reported that the Head of the Milima Prison, Mr David Phiri, has stated that prisoners there are permitted one meal per day only due to broken kitchen equipment. He has reportedly appealed to the government to assist urgently in the provision of kitchen and cooking equipment. The prison's water supply is also reportedly intermittent due to aging water pumps in need of repair. Reported by The Lusaka times, 29 April 2013, at <http://www.lusakatimes.com/2013/04/29/prisoners-eating-one-meal-day-due-to-the-broken-down-kitchen-equipment/>



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