



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 November 2017

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-sixth session

31 January–7 February 2018

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all

Statement submitted by the International Prison Chaplains' Association (IPCA) and Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

A Human Dignity and Faith Perspective on the Eradication of Poverty as One of the Main Root Causes of Incarceration in the World

We, the International Prison Chaplains Association (IPCA), and Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), are NGO organizations with worldwide memberships. We are grateful for this opportunity to share our thoughts on the hidden financial and human costs of worldwide poverty, especially as it relates to criminal Justice and expensive incarceration.

Men, women and youth growing up and living in poverty, and challenging social conditions, are easy prey for criminal activity. As a result, our prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the world are primarily filled with individuals from the lower levels of our societal structures.

To eradicate worldwide poverty, we believe in a strategy of raising the general awareness of the costs of poverty, in society in general, and specifically in relation to our prison system.

We also want to advocate for society's unique opportunity to provide education and rehabilitation to those who have been caught up in our criminal justice system. Such efforts will reduce continued criminal activity by those released, and eliminate costly re-incarceration.

Our joint approach is articulated from a social justice, faith-based perspective with emphasis upon human rights for all, even those who have violated the laws of society and been sentenced to incarceration. While violators need correction, they also deserve an opportunity for repentance, forgiveness and redemption.

We would like to share specific examples of engagements and accomplishments by our two organizations in relation to the alleviation of poverty:

The International Prison Chaplains Association (IPCA) has about two-thousand members serving as Prison Chaplains in more than fifty countries. These chaplains address not only the humanitarian and spiritual needs of people in prison, but also assist in educating the public in their respective local communities on the need for prison reform. In addition, IPCA organizes global conferences for training of its members and for public awareness-raising on prison related issues. The 7th World Conference of the International Prison Chaplains Association in Sydney, Australia in September of 2015 attracted close to three-hundred prison chaplains to a five day event. The 8th World Conference is scheduled for 2020 in Bangkok.

Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), is an international grassroots effort by people in prison, their families and other concerned citizens, seeking to reduce crime and working for criminal justice reform. CURE has thirty-nine chapters in the US and representatives in close to thirty countries. From its Washington, DC headquarters, CURE engages in legislative prison reform efforts in the US. The Seventh International CURE Conference was held in April 2017 in Costa Rica, and the Eighth International Conference is scheduled for May 2018 in Rwanda, with special emphasis on the Restorative Justice approach.

It is a worldwide reality that a large portion of the incarcerated population is composed of marginal or outcast members of a country's populace, such as Native Americans in Canada; the Aborigines in Australia; Gypsies and Refugees in Europe; and Native Americans, African Americans and Latinos in the United States.

As a general comment, we challenge the principle that imprisonment is a successful way to solve the problem of crime in society. We reaffirm the work being done by several governments on the respect for human rights in prisons. We reiterate and reaffirm our emphasis of the following points: the inherent dignity of all prisoners, our particular concern for vulnerable prisoners, and our commitment to work with others including other NGOs, World Organizations, and Faith Groups to address poverty and facilitate access to food, clothing, medicines and literacy supplies needed in prisons. We advocate for the freedom of religion and for respect and resources for Prison Chaplains from all Faith Communities in their ministry of love and hope.

In addition to these efforts, we especially want to highlight three main developments in the world that influence the correctional systems and prison ministry:

1. More than ever an increasing number of people are fleeing their home countries due to war, terrorism, persecution and poverty to seek asylum in the safer countries of the world. We challenge the use of detention facilities for refugees and migrants as the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has aptly declared as being unacceptable.
2. In many countries people are still imprisoned because they are conscientious objectors. We affirm that the rejection of military service is a human right and should not lead to imprisonment.
3. We call again for an immediate worldwide moratorium on executions and the abolition of the death penalty.

We welcome the revision of the United Nations Minimum Standard Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, developed by the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice with support of NGOs with consultant status, such as our Catholic sister organization, International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care (ICPPC). We ask that these rules, now called “The Mandela Rules”, be applied in all countries.

We commit ourselves to use our consultant status in the UN for reconciliation in the societies in which we live and work.

We ask that Governments, Churches and Faith Communities move away from the philosophy of retributive justice and encourage restorative justice strategies.

We are encouraged by examples of Faith Communities being involved in the reintegration of ex-offenders and we pray that this will be developed further in the world.

We encourage Prison Administrators, Governors and Staff in the difficult challenges they face. We urge them to always carry out their duties with integrity, humanity, justice and care.

We affirm our commitment to prisoners, and we encourage them to take part in programs that address offending behavior, victim/offender reconciliation programs, wider education and restorative justice initiatives.

We are aware of the pain of the victims of crime and the lack of opportunity for them to express it. We urge Faith Communities to be more available to help victims work through their pain.

We recognize the need for professional train in for Prison Chaplains and ask that Churches and Faith Communities support such programs. We pray for Prison Chaplains worldwide.

We pledge the support of our joint organizations, IPCA and CURE, to the efforts of the Fifty-sixth Session of the Commission for Social Development in February of 2018.
