

## **Twelfth Congress Workshop: “Strategies and Best Practices against Overcrowding in Correctional Facilities”**

### **The Congress and the Workshop**

The UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice [hereinafter Congress] is the world’s largest international conference in the field of criminal justice, organized by the United Nations every five years since 1955. The Twelfth Congress, held in Salvador, Brazil, from April 12-19, 2010, brought together more than 3,000 participants ranging from Member State delegations, many of which including high-level officials such as Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General, to representatives of international organizations and NGOs, as well as individual experts.

The main theme of the Twelfth Congress was “Comprehensive strategies for global challenges: crime prevention and criminal justice systems and their development in a changing world”, and the participants discussed agenda items such as: children, youth and crime; technical assistance to combat terrorism; revitalization of UN standards regarding crime prevention; and international co-operation against money laundering. The outcome of these discussions was adopted as the Salvador Declaration.

During the Twelfth Congress, five official workshops were held apart from the plenary meetings. One of these workshops, entitled “Strategies and Best Practices against Overcrowding in Correctional Facilities,” was organized by UNAFEI. The background paper prepared for the workshop is available on the UNODC [website](#).

### **Workshop Summary**

#### **1. The Presentation Session**

As an introduction, the following presentations were made by five learned experts; “Current Situation of Prison Overcrowding”, “Causes of Prison Overcrowding”, “Countermeasures against Prison Overcrowding”, and “Specific Situations in Middle and Low Income Countries”. [Click here for the presentation summaries](#).

#### **2. Panel Discussions**

The workshop then held the following three panel discussions. [Click here for the summary of contributions by each panellist](#).

#### **Panel Discussion I**

## **Strategies for the reduction of prison populations through diversion, informal and restorative justice and alternatives to pre-trial detention**

The first panel discussed measures against overcrowding that can be taken at the pre-sentencing stages, particularly measures to reduce the number of pre-trial detainees.

In some developing countries, more than half of all inmates are pre-trial detainees. This is a result of prolonged pre-trial detention due to inefficiency in the trial proceedings. One of the panellists presented a case study in which active utilization of paralegals as substitutes for lawyers helped to improve the situation.

### **Panel Discussion II**

#### **Strategies for reduction of prison populations at the sentencing and post-sentencing stages**

The second panel discussed measures that can be taken at the sentencing and post-sentencing stages.

One panellist pointed out that, while alternatives to imprisonment (e.g. community service orders, home confinement) can serve to reduce prison populations, such alternatives could have an adverse effect if not administered adequately. Another panellist presented a country's experience in significantly reducing prison population by improving the correctional treatment of offenders and preventing recidivism. How parole could be used to reduce prison overcrowding was also discussed.

### **Panel Discussion III**

#### **Strategies for securing support for reduction of prison populations**

The third panel discussed strategies to secure support for the various measures examined by the first two panels. Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Project drew particular attention as a very successful example of achieving broad community support for social reintegration of offenders.

### **Conclusion**

The workshop ran for a total of six hours, having an audience of 150 people and lively discussions throughout. The outcome of these presentations and panel discussions was adopted as [“Recommendations from the Workshop”](#), which were then reported to the plenary session of the Congress. It is hoped that this workshop will be the first step toward resolving the problem of prison overcrowding around the world.