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## PARTICIPANTS' PAPERS

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### **“RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION COMMISSION” AS A PRISON REFORM MEASURE TO IMPROVE OFFENDERS’ TREATMENT IN MOROCCO**

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#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Prison management in Morocco has suffered during the last decades from different problems and difficulties due to many factors such as overcrowding, shortage of staff and funding, ineffective offender orientation and classification, insufficient staff training, etc. Such problems have had negative impacts on the main correctional mission, which is the achievement of safer prisons and less reoffending. Thus, thanks to the royal will and directives to reform the prison system in 2008, the new correctional department’s managers carried out a detailed diagnostic analysis of the current situation after which they elaborated strategic plans and took different measures to make the change and provide solutions to many persisting problems. The ultimate objectives of such reform projects were to improve offenders’ conditions, enhance their rehabilitation, maintain security and discipline in prisons and manage them with more professionalism. One of the main measures which was strongly emphasized and produced satisfactory results was the creation of a “Reception and Orientation Commission” in each facility. The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on this new experience in the correctional department in Morocco.

The correctional studies and research achieved recently proved that many prison management problems are basically due to inappropriate offender reception, orientation and classification. For this reason, there was a reconsideration of the procedures in question, which led to the creation of a commission of reception and orientation in each prison. This measure was a special event in and of itself and a real initiative to improve offender treatment in Morocco. The head of the correctional department, the *Delegue General*, held a meeting with prison wardens and many other officials and stressed that such reform was a real measure towards success. The implementation of this commission will help to ensure that inmates will be more appropriately classified, housed and provided with necessary rehabilitative services.

#### **II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

It is stated in the Moroccan Prisons Act 23/98 (Article 52) that once new offenders are admitted in prisons, they must be received by medical staff and a social assistant or the director himself. This procedure is only with regard to internal classification, and it is basically performed by or under the supervision of the warden.

External classification is managed at the level of the headquarters by a central commission whose members are designated by the head of the correctional department, as stated in articles 21-22 of the Prisons Act 23/98. This provision requires that classification be carried out according to many criteria, including the offender’s age, gender, family address, criminal history, physical and mental situation, and the offender’s profile in general.

#### **III. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION COMMISSION**

With regard to both security and reinsertion levels, the Reception and Orientation Commission is composed of members representing different prison services: a psychologist, a social assistant, a case manager and a member of security staff along with the social supervisor as the president of the commission. The commission operates under the direct supervision of the warden of the prison.

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#### IV. MISSIONS OF THE RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION COMMISSION

Generally speaking, there are three levels of missions: at the time of first reception, during incarceration and before release.

##### **A. At First Reception:**

Once new offenders arrive at a facility, they are subject to the intake process including personal identification and initial needs and risk assessments for both preliminary classification and treatment purposes so as to match their needs and risks with the correctional resources. The intake process begins with personal identification which is conducted by trained administrative staff who are generally case managers. Then, needs and risk assessments are completed through interviews and examinations which allow the commission to determine housing recommendations, program assignments, treatment and educational services required for each offender.

The medical assessment determines whether newly admitted offenders have contagious diseases that require immediate attention. This task is usually carried out by a qualified nurse and a more thorough physical examination is performed by a doctor shortly thereafter. The psychologist conducts a brief interview and may complete some psychological tests to identify the offender's characteristics and needs for mental health services. He asks new offenders questions about their mental health histories and current mental conditions with the use of different factors related to suicide, self-injury, substance abuse, violence, etc. Of course, the result of such psychological and mental assessments provides critical data for classification, programming and treatment.

The social assistant determines the offenders' needs — through brief interviews and case-file analysis — in terms of educational and vocational programmes, visitation, family circumstances and other rehabilitative services.

The case manager and the security staff conduct the offenders' initial risk assessments based on the findings of medical, mental and social assessments. More information is very critical to conducting a comprehensive and complete initial risk assessment. Thus, various factors are taken into consideration in this concern, including age, gender, sentence length, severity of prior and current offences, time left to serve, criminal history, offender characteristics, prior institutional disciplinary actions, degree of hostility, etc. Such factors are useful indicators to predict hostile behaviour, criminal conduct, escapes, etc. Admittedly, initial risk assessment is not preformed through validated evaluation, analytic tests, standard techniques or objective scoring forms. It relies, on the one hand, on the findings of interviews, inquiries and case-file analysis, and, on the other hand, on the experience and subjective evaluations of professional officials. When enough data is not available at the time of admission or shortly thereafter, risk assessment may fail, and most of the time, insufficient data leads to poor assessments and misclassification.

Once initial needs and risk assessments are performed, commission members analyse all the collected data and make recommendations to the warden about the new offenders' preliminary classifications, which the warden then reviews and either approves or changes. Thus, classification assessment relies on both needs and risk assessments, which are very useful to determine housing recommendations, required intensiveness of supervision, programming, health care, etc. Risk assessment, in particular, is very critical to predict offenders' misconduct and to identify those with high probabilities of misbehaviour or those in danger of causing injury to themselves, others or property.

To facilitate new offenders' adaptation and acquaint them with the facility's rules and regulations, the commission provides them with orientation including information about their rights and responsibilities. New inmates are also allowed to contact their families to inform them about their imprisonment, and they are asked to provide a relative's or a friend's phone number so that the commission can contact them in case of emergency.

##### **B. During the Period of Incarceration:**

Duties of the commission members do not stop at the intake process; they have to collect more information about offenders and necessary documentation to complete case files in coordination with others services. In addition, they have to conduct a close follow-up of difficult and vulnerable cases of offenders: mainly those with

high probabilities of misbehaviour, those with high mental health needs, and those with disabilities or other major medical issues.

The commission also conducts risk reassessment through more data collection, tracking and interaction because it is not possible to accurately assess risk if there is no communication with the offenders. When conflicts occur between offenders, the commission may intervene to mediate the dispute and show them how to solve their problems without seeking recourse to verbal or non-verbal aggression or physical violence. For this reason, the psychologist or social assistant assist meetings of the disciplinary commission in cases of an offender's misconduct so that they can provide more information and suggestions about each case when necessary.

One of the main purposes of risk reassessment is to make recommendations about reclassification and to identify, among offenders who behave themselves, those of low risk of reoffending who may be considered as good candidates for the Royal Pardon.

Concerning rehabilitative issues, commission members, during the follow-up process, detect barriers to an offender's reinsertion and make suggestions to the warden so that he can take necessary measures. They also establish contact with offenders' families to get them involved in the process of their rehabilitation through consistent visitation, motivation and assistance.

Under specific circumstances, offenders who meet strict requirements may be allowed a temporary release from custody whereby they can be in the community for 10 days without a staff escort, as stated in articles 46-49 of the Prisons Act 23/98. In case an offender applies for this temporary release, commission members review his application, provide an objective evaluation of his conduct and offer their recommendations. In addition, the commission communicates with the judge in charge of supervising "sentence-application" and shares information and difficulties related to offenders' life management and problems.

### **C. Before Release**

Since the ultimate objective of imprisonment has become rehabilitation and reducing reoffending, the commission's duty in this regard is to ensure that offenders are released with preparation, guidance and assistance to facilitate their reintegration into society. In addition, the commission coordinates with the post-release units of "King Med VI Offenders' Reinsertion Institution" concerning offenders soon to be released. The purpose is to make sure they will receive the required assistance from qualified, certified individuals who participated in rehabilitative programmes.

## **V. COMMISSION DUTIES**

The Reception and Orientation Commission has many administrative duties to carry out. First, it has to complete the case file of each offender (penal, medical, social, disciplinary, etc.) and make sure that the file will follow the offender to any prison to which the offender is transferred. This is for tracking and treatment purposes.

The commission also has to make three main reports providing statistics, achievements and encountered problems as follows:

- Write a detailed report every month to the warden including observations about new offenders and offering suggestions about the management of their incarceration.
- Make a report every three months to the warden giving statistics about different offenders' programmes together with encountered problems and suggested remedies.
- Make a report every six months explaining the detected social, psychological and mental phenomena related to offenders' situations and life conditions in addition to anti-social acts with explanations about their causes and consequences.

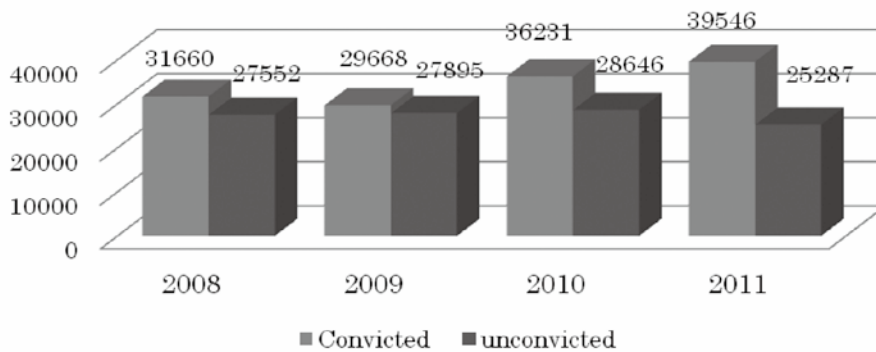
**VI. PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES**

Since the constitution of Reception and Orientation Commissions in prisons, they have accomplished many achievements mainly in terms of orientation, needs and risk assessments, and classification. However, while carrying out their duties, they encounter many problems and difficulties namely in terms of correctional resources.

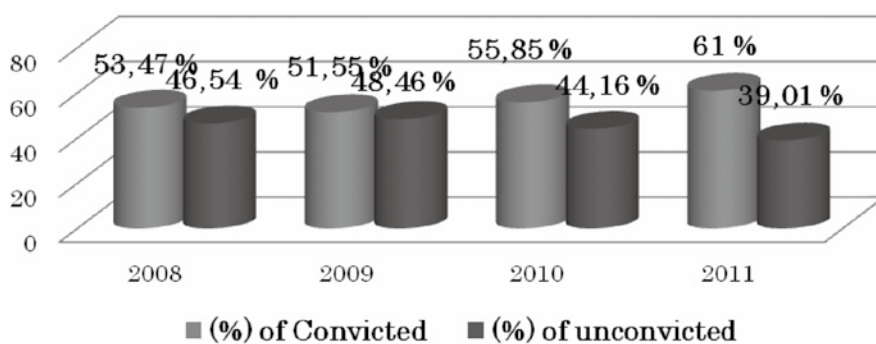
The first big problem lies in the overcrowding of Moroccan prisons which is an old issue and still represents a real barrier to perform appropriate classification. In order to overcome such a problem, seven new prisons have been built recently with modern characteristics taking into consideration both security and rehabilitation requirements in terms of housing units, recreation areas, vocational training centers, infirmaries, etc. At the same time, four old prisons have been closed because they are no longer acceptable. Other existing old facilities do not have sufficient housing units and appropriate infrastructure to apply classification recommendations correctly. For this reason, extensions and additional housing units have been built in four prisons which have enough space to allow that.

The Code of Criminal Procedure in Morocco considers offenders as unconvicted until they are tried and proven guilty. Thus, many offenders may appeal after being tried for the first or second time, and they may be released before their trials are held. As a result of this, about 40% of the offender population is non-convicted. This situation represents a big problem to improve classification, and does not allow satisfactory achievement of offender programmes, knowing that unconvicted offenders are accommodated in almost all types of prisons.

**Total convicted and unconvicted inmates (2008-2011)**



**The ratio of convicted and unconvicted inmates (2008-2011)**



In terms of human resources, the shortage of staff does not allow for effective tracking, constant supervision or appropriate treatment of offenders: 8,969 employees, including administrative staff, for more than 66,000 inmates. More than 3,000 employees have been hired in the past four years; however, the number of correctional staff remains insufficient to perform prison reforms properly.

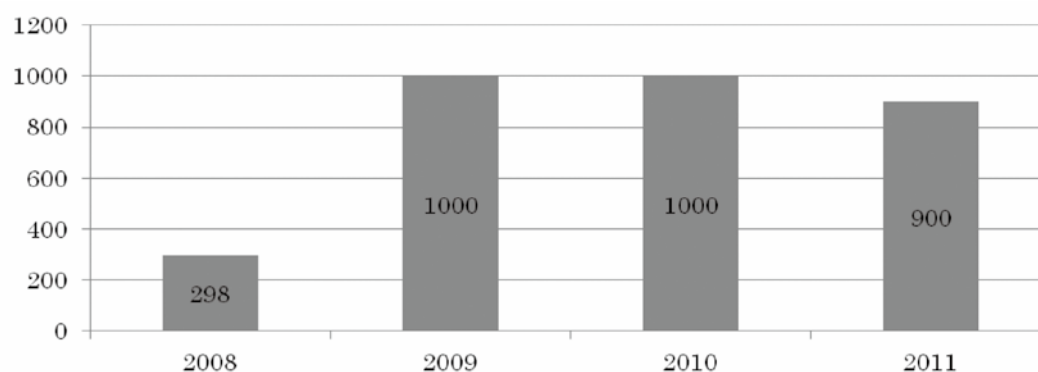
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For rehabilitation purposes, the correctional department recruited over the past three years many technicians in different fields, such as social assistants, teachers, psychologists, nurses, and prison commanders who are master's-level administrative employees. This was not the case before and is thanks to a growing awareness that prison management does not only need security employees and correctional officers. Despite such new policies of recruiting, some facilities still do not have psychologists or social assistants; this problem has had negative impacts on the performance of the Reception and Orientation Commission in particular. This is due to the fact that even when job announcements are made in this regard, few or no applications are normally made.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Technicians	23	0	125	156	141	445
Prison commanders	31	0	97	126	148	402
Doctors	0	5	9	16	19	49
Dentists	4	4	5	9	13	35
Pharmacists	0	0	1	0	1	2
Administrators	0	1	35	1	0	37
Psychologists	0	0	7	2	0	9
Social assistants	0	0	17	9	0	28
Teachers	0	0	9	16	19	44
Nurses	0	0	8	1	49	58
Correctional officers	0	305	800	799	811	2715

Another problem relating to human resources lies in their qualification and performance because staff training was not emphasized as has been the case during the last four years. As a matter of fact, basic and refresher training remains a useful tool to carry on correctional reforms and improve prison management.

**Staff Basic Training from 2008 to 2011**



## VII. ACHIEVEMENTS

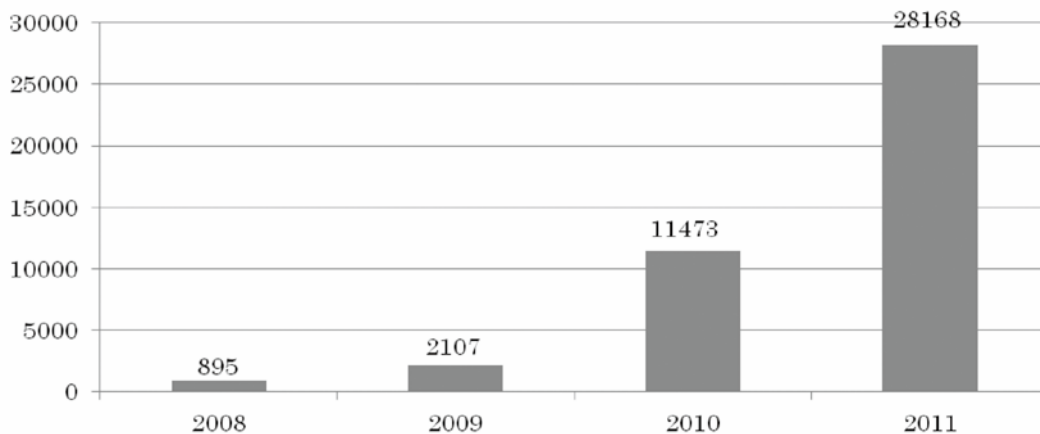
The creation of Reception and Orientation Commissions was an achievement and a turning point because it made it possible to emphasize issues like orientation, needs and risk assessments, classification, etc. In addition, despite the inadequacy of correctional resources with regard to requirements in terms of staff, equipment, housing units, etc., great achievements have been made, like the reduction of violence rates, contraband, and prison breaks. This is due to better risk assessment, mediation, tracking, better supervision, and assistance provided by commission members and their collaborators.

**Rates of Prison Break from 2005 to 2011**

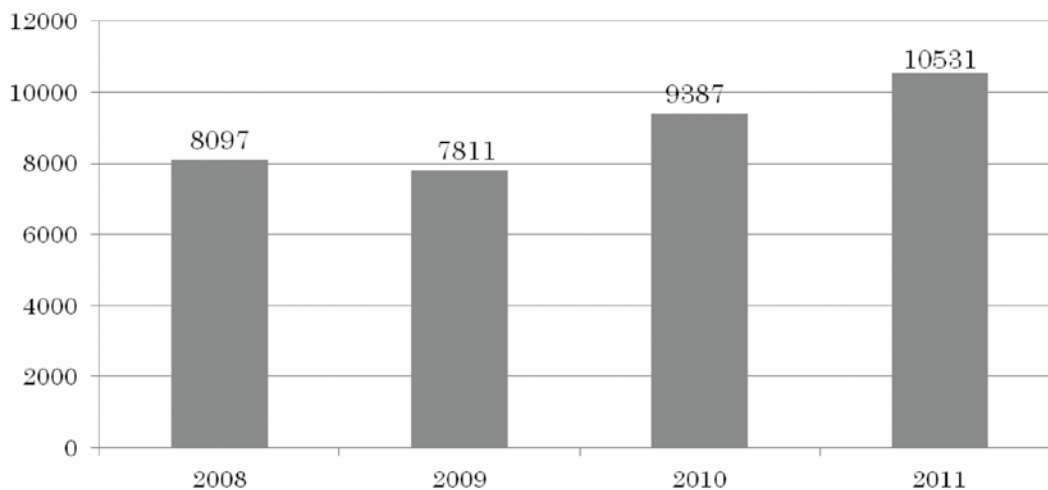
Years	Prison breaks	Total Offenders	(%)
2005	23	50,933	0.0451
2006	21	53,544	0.0392
2007	20	54,660	0.0365
2008	30	59,212	0.0506
2009	3	57,563	0.0052
2010	5	64,877	0.0077
2011	3	64,833	0.0046

In terms of reinsertion, the improved aspects of reception, orientation, mediation, psychological and social assistance, etc. helped many offenders and their families change their attitudes and have more confidence and trust in the prison staff and correctional programmes. In addition, the recruitment of new categories of employees (other than correctional officers) has had a positive impact on the elaboration and performance of more cultural and recreational programmes. On the other hand, thanks to efforts made by these new categories of employees, good results have been made in terms of productive-use-of-time activities and the number of inmates participating in educational and vocational programmes.

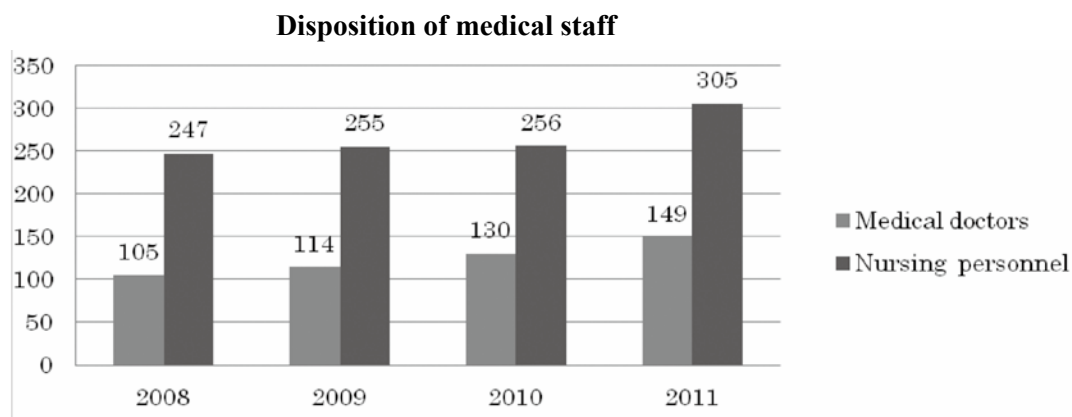
**Cultural and recreational activities from 2008 to 2011**



**Offenders participating in vocational and educational programmes**



Recruiting more doctors over the past four years (+43%) has made it possible to improve medical assessment and health care, which are very useful to offenders' reception, classification and treatment.



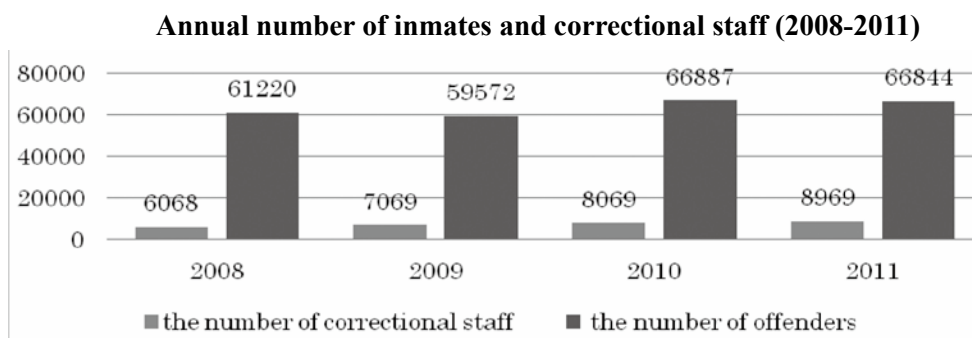
The creation of Reception and Orientation Commissions made it possible also to improve offenders' classification and treatment. As a result of this, every offender gets what he or she deserves, in general: in cases of good conduct, privileges are allowed and in cases of misbehaviour, disciplinary measures are taken, and thus reclassification procedures are objectively applied.

At the same time, 38 of 68 prisons have now what we call "Pedagogical Centers" equipped and managed by the "King Med VI Offenders' Reinsertion Institution," which is regarded as the first partner of the correctional department. Such great achievements allowed the elaboration of various vocational and educational programmes, reduced offenders' idleness and contributed in many ways to the improvement of prison management and reinsertion services.

### VIII. CHALLENGES AND PROJECTS

Challenges of the department of correction are manifestly related to the encountered problems and difficulties. One of the main challenges in this regard is to achieve a sophisticated information management system which includes an intake module for collecting and compiling offenders' criminal histories. In the same way, the lack of information about the criminal history of many offenders is due to both the absence of efficient databases and the absence of a national correctional computer linkage with courts and other departments. As a matter of fact, timely, accurate and complete data would manifestly enhance offenders' needs and risk assessments which are basically related to their classification, treatment and reintegration programmes.

In fact, the ratio of inmates per officer has been improved during the last four years: in 2008 it was 14:1, and thanks to the increase in hiring rates it is now 11:1, whereas the ratio stands at 2:1 or 3:1 in North American and European countries. Yet, this achievement remains insufficient for efficient supervision and offender management. For this reason, another critical challenge is to hire more staff and provide them with appropriate basic and refresher training, knowing that the correctional department has just built a new training academy in Tiflet (30 km from Rabat) with modern characteristics, which will make it possible to conduct more basic and refresher training sessions for correctional staff.



Finally, so as to overcome overcrowding, which has become a real dilemma in Moroccan prisons, the department of corrections is building three new prisons, but the challenge in this regard is to continue building more modern prisons and close old ones which counteract the carrying out of the department's policies in terms of both security and rehabilitation. For this reason the correctional department has recently submitted to the government a proposal to build 12 more prisons with different capacities for accommodation in different regions of the kingdom to meet the immediate needs.

### **IX. CONCLUSION**

Thanks to the royal directives and strong will, the great reform initiatives and achievements have been carried out in the past four years. However, more imperative reforms and challenges are still to be fulfilled to reach the main objectives, which are safer prisons and better preparation of offenders for successful community reintegration. After all, a prison is a human and social-service enterprise, and its success depends largely on offenders' reception, classification and rehabilitation.