



14TH UNITED NATIONS CONGRESS ON CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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Integrated approaches to challenges facing the criminal justice system

Criminal justice systems around the world face many challenges. Integrated and coordinated approaches are essential to address them effectively, and the United Nations plays a vital role.

Challenges include persistently high levels of crime and violence, the need to respond to new forms of criminality as well as enhancing responses to criminal behaviours that have long pervaded societies including corruption and violence against women and children.

Many criminal justice systems around the world are overburdened with heavy caseloads and suffer from insufficient financial and human resources. This leads to various malfunctions of the justice system, including high levels of impunity, delays in the administration of justice, overuse of pretrial detention often for lengthy periods, insufficient use of alternative sentencing options, overcrowded prisons that cannot fulfil their rehabilitative function and high rates of reoffending.

Criminal justice systems often suffer from a compartmentalization and lack of integration of the different components of the criminal justice chain, as well as a lack of coordination and collaboration with other sectors essential to ensuring integration responses to crime and violence such as the health, education and social welfare sectors.

The United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice are a reliable resource for tackling these challenges. They assist Member States in achieving a fair, effective and humane criminal justice system, with minimum standard rules or basic principles on a wide variety of criminal justice issues. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) assists Member States to use these standards and norms which represent the best practices that can be adopted by States to meet their specific contexts and needs.

Violence against women

Eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres is the

second target under Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.

Violence against women is alarmingly widespread throughout the world, occurring regardless of development context. It manifests itself in physical, sexual and psychological forms through multiple types of crime, such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence and harassment, trafficking in people for sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and child marriage.

One in three women worldwide has experience physical or sexual violence, mostly from an intimate partner. One in two women victims of homicide is killed by their partner or family members.

In many societies violence against women and children have not been regarded as serious offences and remain unreported and unaddressed by justice systems. This, despite their detrimental and long-lasting consequences for the well-being, health and safety of women and girls as well as their families and communities.

An integrated approach is critical to ensure victims are protected and supported, with coordination between the health, social, police and justice sectors.

A lack of victim-centred processes and unfamiliarity with gender-sensitive approaches are just two of the persistent challenges in dealing with violence against women. These factors can lead to a loss of confidence and trust in criminal justice institutions by victims and a high degree of impunity for perpetrators in some countries.

The United Nations system takes an integrated approach to addressing violence against women. UN Women, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UNODC and the World Health Organization run the UN Joint Global Programme to support Member States in effectively tackling violence against women and providing services for women and girls. The initiative is running pilots in 10 countries: Cambodia, Egypt, Guatemala, Kiribati,



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Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru, Solomon Islands, Tunisia and Viet Nam, with a view to a global roll-out.

Violence against children

Violence affects millions of children all over the world, cutting across culture, class, education, income level and ethnic origin and is a major threat to sustainable development. Most cases of violence against children are implicitly socially condoned but not legally sanctioned. It often remains unrecorded, unprosecuted and unpunished.

Children have a right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Should children become victims of violence, States are required to take all appropriate measures to promote their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration. States should also ensure that children in conflict with the law are protected from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, that detention is used as a measure of last resort, that they are not put in prison with adults and that all justice interventions promote their reintegration into society.

Children who suffer from violence can lack the capabilities to claim their rights, because of lack of access to legal aid, awareness of justice procedures and access to health care. UNODC's Global Programme to End Violence against Children supports Member States to strengthen their justice systems to prevent and respond to violence against children effectively.

The recruitment and exploitation of children by terrorist and violent extremist groups is a serious form of violence against children. UNODC has provided in-depth guidance and training to Member States on how to prevent child involvement with terrorist and violence extremist groups, how to promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with those groups and how to

ensure the appropriate treatment of those children when they are in contact with the justice system.

Over the last four years, more than 30 countries have received assistance in this regard. In Niger, more than 100 children deprived of liberty for their association with Boko Haram were released from detention and handed over to the child protection system to start a process of reintegration into their communities, as a result of technical assistance provided by multiple UN entities including UNODC.

Support and protection for victims

Victims of crime are often the most left behind in criminal justice systems. Increasing victim support and protection is vital to preventing secondary victimization and revictimization and to increasing the reporting of incidents.

Access to legal aid is another measure that can increase support and protection for victims of crime. It is particularly important for women offenders who typically come from disadvantage and marginalized backgrounds.

Restorative justice gives those affected by crime a voice and an opportunity to participate in the resolution of a crime in a way that conventional criminal justice processes do not. It can be a useful mechanism for providing additional support to victims.

Criminal justice systems have to carefully balance the needs of communities and societies for protection and safety, the needs of victims for justice and reparation and the need to hold offenders accountable, while ensuring their rehabilitation and social reintegration and reducing reoffending.

Providing access to justice for all and ensuring effective, accountable and inclusive criminal justice systems is essential to sustainable development and covered under Sustainable Development Goal 16.