Penal Reform International
Penal Reform International (PRI) is an independent non-governmental human rights organisation that develops and promotes fair, effective and proportionate responses to criminal justice problems worldwide.

We believe in a fair and effective criminal justice.

Fair
- Respect the rule of law
- Detention as last resort
- Proportionate sentencing
- Humane treatment and conditions for prisoners
- Strong international human rights standards implemented nationally

Effective
- Uphold rights of suspects and defendants
- Prevent unnecessary use of pre-trial detention
- Train prison staff, law-enforcement and government officials
- Build safer communities through rehabilitation

We engage with governments and prison authorities seeking to reform penal legislation, policy and practice, and bring them in line with international human rights standards.

Working with others strengthens our voice. We seek to build the capacity of domestic civil society through joint programming and sharing expertise through our networks, events and training.

We analyse, make recommendations and advocate for principled and fair standards to be adopted regionally and internationally. We promote their implementation nationally.

We support new systems, institutions and practices through a range of practical programmes, tailored to the specific country context and needs of domestic civil society.

Research helps us to understand the current situation, convince policymakers, and develop recommendations appropriate to the specific country and context.

Our vision
Safe and secure societies where offenders are held to account, victims’ rights are recognised, sentences are proportionate and the primary purpose of prison is social rehabilitation, not retribution, based on international human rights standards.

Our monitoring, evaluation and learning systems measure the impact of our work, inform our next steps, and help us to convince policymakers to sustain reforms.

Through our presence in multiple regions, we are close to the national contexts and develop practical projects allowing us to tailor our work and ensure impact.
We operate throughout the criminal justice process.

Through our advocacy and practical programmes, we operate in ten priority areas throughout the criminal justice system to make it fair and effective.

**WOMEN IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**
We promote gender-sensitive criminal justice and penal policies, as well as greater use of non-custodial alternatives.

**LIFE IMPRISONMENT**
We advocate that no one should be imprisoned for life without the possibility of one day at least being considered for release.

**PRISON CONDITIONS**
We advocate for humane prison conditions as a prerequisite of fair criminal justice systems.

**PRE-TRIAL JUSTICE**
Pre-trial detention is often unnecessary and can prejudice a fair trial. We campaign against its excessive use and promote alternative measures.

**REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION**
We promote rehabilitation as the primary aim of all criminal justice systems.

**LIFE IMPRISONMENT**
We advocate that no one should be imprisoned for life without the possibility of one day at least being considered for release.

**DEATH PENALTY**
We campaign for the abolition of the death penalty and for humane alternative sanctions.

**TORTURE PREVENTION**
Torture destroys a person’s dignity, body and mind. We seek to establish and improve safeguards against torture and ill-treatment in detention.

**ALTERNATIVES TO IMPRISONMENT**
We promote fair and proportionate sentencing and greater use of non-custodial measures.

**GLOBAL ADVOCACY**
We contribute to the development and implementation of human rights and criminal justice standards.

**DEATH PENALTY**
We campaign for the abolition of the death penalty and for humane alternative sanctions.

**JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN**
We promote child-friendly justice systems which use detention only as a last resort and recognise the right of children to special protection.

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Why is our work needed?

More than 10 million men, women and children are detained around the world. More than 30% of those are children. Around 1 million children are detained around the world.

Policies that are meant to keep our communities safe have resulted in a criminal justice system that has incarcerated millions more people than there are convicted criminals.

- Crime rates are in decline
- Prison population is increasing
- More than 30% are awaiting trial, presumed innocent
- Around 120 countries are overcrowded
- The number of prisoners serving life-long sentences increased
- The use of the death penalty is decreasing
- The number of people in prison rose by 20% between 2002 and 2015
- The number of prisoners serving life sentences increased by 84% between 2000 and 2018
- Prisons are often becoming schools of crime
- The use of solitary confinement is still widely used
- In many countries prisoners are still prevented from having regular contact with the outside world
- We believe in a fair and effective criminal justice.
We've helped probation officers adopt a gender-sensitive approach

The emotional, social and economic consequences of imprisonment experienced by women are acute and enduring and extend to their families – and particularly to their children. Non-custodial sanctions offer the potential to avoid imprisonment, but they have been almost exclusively created for men, and the differing needs and experience of women have largely been overlooked. PRI led a pioneering project in Kenya that explored ways of adapting a gender-sensitive approach to non-custodial sentences, such as community service and probation orders. As part of this project, PRI worked with the Kenya Probation and Aftercare Service to amend pre-sentence reports – produced by probation officers to inform magistrates of the background of an offender and recommend sentencing options such as community sanctions – so that they better reflect women’s realities and backgrounds. Probation officers received training on using the adapted tools and implementing a gender-sensitive approach to their work.

We've launched the first prison radio station in the MENA region

In collaboration with the British Embassy and Morocco’s General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration, PRI launched the first ever prison radio station in the Middle East and North Africa region. Idmaj Radio, which is based at Casablanca Oukacha prison, will provide both prisoners and prison staff with the opportunity to discuss important issues related to prison, offending and rehabilitation, as well as increase prisoners’ contact with the outside world – a key factor in improving mental health and reducing feelings of isolation. The radio will initially be broadcast from Oukacha prison and will then be launched at other prisons in the country.

We've helped women offenders reintegrate back into society

Stigma and discrimination towards those who have been in prison are still prevalent in Georgia, and unemployment is high – making it difficult for women to find jobs upon release. PRI works in partnership with four Georgian NGOs to help female offenders access support services that will help them reintegrate into their communities, such as legal aid, psychological counselling, medical services, vocational training, start-up grants for small businesses, and work opportunities. Legal aid and psychological counselling have proved pivotal in the rehabilitation process for some women, allowing them to overcome long-term problems such as obtaining custody of children or a lack of confidence.
Since PRI’s creation 30 years ago, we have worked in over 90 countries and territories – always aiming at long-term engagement and impact, remaining flexible and seizing opportunities to reform criminal justice systems.

Today, we run four regional offices close to the national contexts and develop practical projects allowing us to tailor our work and ensure impact.

We act locally and globally.

Countries where PRI is currently also working.

Countries where PRI has worked.

PRI Headquarters
United Kingdom
London

PRI MENA
Jordan
Amman

PRI South Caucasus
Georgia
Tbilisi

PRI Central Asia
Kazakhstan
Astana

PRI Sub-Saharan Africa
Uganda
Kampala

Due to the stigma faced by having been in prison. Skills training has had a therapeutic effect, helping women regain their status as carers for their families and providing structure to their daily routines in prison.

We’ve helped reduce violence against children in detention

Children in closed institutions across the world are vulnerable to violence, both from their peers and from staff. PRI’s three-year project in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan aimed to reduce incidents of violence against children in detention, as well as reduce the use of solitary confinement – which can have severe and adverse effects on mental health.

In Kazakhstan, PRI was an active member of the Working Group on Reform of the Criminal Executive Code, providing technical assistance to the Group to help draft new legislation. This resulted in the maximum period of solitary confinement for children being reduced from seven to three days, with children allowed to leave solitary confinement to participate in classes; PRI continues to advocate in the region for the strict prohibition of solitary confinement for children. In Kyrgyzstan, a pilot counselling programme in a juvenile correction facility for boys had positive results, and children demonstrated improved emotional and psychological well-being. Training for staff on child rights and the use of non-violent disciplinary measures was also held across the three countries.

Director of a closed institution for children in Kazakhstan.

“When I was initially appointed, the school had some major problems: children were breaking the furniture and the staff were not trained to deal with their behaviour. [Now] we have established good discipline to deal with difficult boys. We use democratic policies (e.g. class president) and provide rewards for good behaviour.”

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