

КЫРГЫЗ РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНДА ПЕНИТЕНЦИАРДЫК ТУТУМДУН РЕФОРМАСЫН КОЛДОО ПОДДЕРЖКА РЕФОРМЫ ПЕНИТЕНЦИАРНОЙ СИСТЕМЫ В КЫРГЫЗСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ SUPPORT TO PRISON REFORM IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

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Ownership and coordination key to advancing prison reform - Case Study on the new Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System in Kyrgyzstan

On 15 May 2012, the Government of Kyrgyzstan adopted a new National Strategy on the Development of the Penitentiary System in the Kyrgyz Republic. This strategy, covering the period from 2012 to 2016, aims to improve prison conditions and promote social reintegration of detainees. It replaces the programme ‘Umut’ (i.e. ‘Hope’), which guided the efforts of the Kyrgyz Government to reform its penitentiary system during the past 5 years. Consultations on the new strategy were facilitated by the EU/UNODC project ‘Support to Prison Reform in the Kyrgyz Republic’. The strategy was presented to the media and the public during a press conference in Bishkek on 29 May 2012.

An honest assessment

“The strategy is intended to radically change the situation in the Kyrgyz penitentiary system”, said Marat Kanulkulov, Head of the Kyrgyz Prison Service’s Department for Legal Affairs and International Cooperation, at the press conference. As a starting point, the strategy contains a detailed overview of the current state of the Kyrgyz penitentiary system, including an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Among positive developments in recent years, the strategy highlights the following:



- The abolishment of the death penalty;
- Revision of criminal legislation resulting in the full elimination or reduction of prison sentences for a range of infractions; this has helped to reduce the prison population from nearly 17,000 detainees in 2004 to less than 10,000 in 2012;
- A greater focus on the rights of prisoners and social support, including through drug and alcohol abuse treatment;
- Strengthened professional training opportunities for prison staff;
- Renovation of prison hospitals, including those providing tuberculosis treatment;
- Establishment of a social-psychological support unit within the prison service.

However, many challenges remain. Amongst others, the strategy identifies the following:

- No new prisons have been built and necessary renovation and reconstruction of living areas and other infrastructure in existing places of detention have not yet been undertaken or completed;

- Separating different categories of prisoners remains difficult as existing structures do not have appropriate facilities; specific facilities to hold prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment are not available;
- Most prisons are concentrated in the Chui region around Bishkek leading to high costs for the transportation of prisoners and making it more difficult for prisoners from other regions to receive family visits;
- Medical equipment remains outdated;
- Professionalism of prison staff remains low due to poor pay, limited benefits and an overall lack of prestige attached to work in the penitentiary system;
- Possibilities for prisoners to engage in productive activities remain limited due to a lack of funds, equipment and infrastructure; hence, prisons have limited capacities to prepare prisoners for social reintegration after completing their sentences.



During the press conference, some of these challenges were discussed. “As a result of limited social support and rehabilitation, recidivism rates are high in Kyrgyzstan”, stressed EU/UNODC Project Manager Vera Tkachenko. In order to address this, the new strategy identifies a number of key priorities. These include further development of penal legislation, the improvement of prison conditions, including the provision of better health care, and the creation of better opportunities for professional development and social protection of prison staff. The new strategy pays particular attention to the development of income generating activities, vocational training and social rehabilitation of prisoners. Commitment to make progress on the implementation of alternative forms of punishment also features as a core priority.

Open and transparent consultations

The new strategy is the result of a nearly two-year long consultation process facilitated by the EU/UNODC project ‘Support to Prison Reform in the Kyrgyz Republic’. This process, which benefited from strong government commitment, started with the organisation in October 2010 and January 2011 of practical training on strategic planning for staff of the Kyrgyz Prison Service. This led to the preparation of a first draft of the strategy.

In order to further enrich the drafting process, the EU/UNODC project then implemented a comprehensive training programme for prison staff on thematic issues to be addressed by the strategy. This included sessions on prison leadership, business planning, production management, and working with prisoners with special needs. Two study visits also fed into the ongoing debate: one in August 2011 to the United Kingdom to review good practices in prison management and alternatives to imprisonment; and another visit to Turkey in October 2011 to learn about income generating activities in the prison system.

Successive drafts of the strategy were discussed in an open and transparent manner. In December 2010, the EU/UNODC project facilitated a public hearing on the strategy attended by more than 60 government and non-government actors. In addition, the strategy was debated within the Coordination Council on Prison Reform throughout 2011. This Council, established with the support of the project, unites all those involved or interested in the work of the penitentiary system, including representatives from the prison service, members of parliament, senior staff

from government ministries and agencies, and representatives from civil society and international organisations.

Following the October 2011 presidential elections and the subsequent formation of a new government, the draft strategy was submitted for government consideration leading to the final endorsement by the Kyrgyz government on 15 May 2012. Attention will now shift to implementation of the strategy. The EU/UNODC project, which runs until June 2013, will continue to support efforts in this direction with the publication of a training manual for prison staff, the completion of refurbishment works in four selected prisons, and the establishment of at least three new production facilities in prisons to actively engage prisoners and strengthen prospects for social rehabilitation.