

Introduction

Since its foundation, the United Nations has been active in the development and promotion of internationally recognized principles in crime prevention and criminal justice. Over the years a considerable body of United Nations standards and norms related to crime prevention and criminal justice has emerged, covering a wide variety of issues such as juvenile justice, the treatment of offenders, international cooperation, good governance, victim protection and violence against women. The United Nations congresses on crime prevention and criminal justice, which have been held on a quinquennial basis since 1955, have proved to be an invaluable source and driving force for this process.

Criminal justice systems differ from one country to the other and their response to antisocial behaviours is not always homogeneous. However, over the years the United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice have provided a collective vision of how criminal justice system should be structured. Despite their “soft-law” nature, the standards and norms have made a significant contribution to promoting more effective and fair criminal justice structures in three dimensions. Firstly, they can be utilized at the national level by fostering in-depth assessments leading to the adoption of necessary criminal justice reforms. Secondly, they can help countries to develop subregional and regional strategies. Thirdly, globally and internationally, the standards and norms represent “best practices” that can be adapted by States to meet national needs.

The first edition of the Compendium of *United Nations Standards and Norms in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice*¹ was published in 1992.

Between the first edition of the *Compendium* and the present one, new standards and norms have been developed and five binding legal instruments have been negotiated and adopted by the international community: the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime² and its three supplementary protocols (the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children,³ the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air⁴ and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and

¹United Nations publication, Sales No. E.92.IV.1 and corrigendum.

²General Assembly resolution 55/25, annex I.

³General Assembly resolution 55/25, annex II.

⁴General Assembly resolution 55/25, annex III.

Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition⁵) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.⁶ The standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice, developed over the last 60 years have paved the way to the adoption of those conventions and have provided a starting point for their negotiation. Now the hope is that those legal instruments will reinforce and strengthen the value and significance of the standards and norms, by eliciting the kind of system-wide cooperation that will give full weight to their further application.

The present edition of the *Compendium* has been structured according to a new clustering system articulated as follows: (a) standards and norms related primarily to persons in custody, non-custodial sanctions and juvenile and restorative justice; (b) standards and norms related primarily to legal, institutional and practical arrangements for international cooperation; (c) standards and norms related primarily to crime prevention and victim issues; and (d) standards and norms related primarily to good governance, the independence of the judiciary and the integrity of criminal justice personnel.

Additional international instruments that could assist crime prevention and criminal justice practitioners in their work can be found in *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments*,⁷ published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

It is hoped that this updated version of the *Compendium* will contribute to a wider awareness and dissemination of the United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice and, consequently, will reinforce respect for the rule of law and human rights in the administration of justice.⁸

⁵General Assembly resolution 55/255, annex.

⁶General Assembly resolution 58/4, annex.

⁷United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.XIV.4. Additional useful information can be found in the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at www.ohchr.org

⁸Additional useful information can be found in the website of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime at www.unodc.org