

UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY



Distr.  
LIMITED

A/CONF.6/L.2  
25 August 1955

Original: ENGLISH



FIRST UNITED NATIONS CONGRESS ON THE PREVENTION  
OF CRIME AND THE TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS

Geneva, 22 August - 3 September 1955

Plenary Meeting

OPEN INSTITUTIONS

Recommendations adopted by Section II

(I) An open institution is characterized by the absence of material or physical precautions against escape (such as walls, locks, bars, armed or other special security guards), and by a system based on self-discipline and the inmate's sense of responsibility towards the group in which he lives. This system encourages the inmate to use the freedom accorded to him without abusing it. It is these characteristics which distinguish the open institution from other types of institutions, some of which are run on the same principles, without, however, realizing them to the full.

(II) The open institution ought, in principle, to be an independent establishment; it may, however, where necessary, form a separate annex to an institution of another type.

(III) In accordance with each country's prison system, prisoners may be sent to such an institution either at the beginning of their sentence or after they have served part of it in an institution of a different type.

(IV) The criterion governing the selection of prisoners for admission to an open institution should be, not the particular penal or correctional category to which the offender belongs, nor the length of his sentence, but his suitability for admission to an open institution and the fact that his social readjustment is more likely to be achieved by such a system than by treatment under other forms of detention. The selection should, as far as possible, be made on the basis of a medico-psychological examination and a social investigation.

(V) Any inmate found incapable of adapting himself to treatment in an open institution or whose conduct is seriously detrimental to the proper control of the institution or has an unfortunate effect on the behaviour of other inmates should be transferred to an institution of a different type.

(VI) The success of an open institution depends on the fulfilment of the following conditions in particular:

- (a) if the institution is situated in the country, it should not be so isolated as to obstruct the purpose of the institution or to cause excessive inconvenience to the staff;

- (b) with a view to their social rehabilitation, prisoners should be employed in work which will prepare them for useful and remunerative employment after release.

While the provision of agricultural work is an advantage, it is desirable also to provide workshops in which the prisoners can receive vocational and industrial training;

- (c) if the process of social readjustment is to take place in an atmosphere of trust, it is essential that the members of the staff should be acquainted with and understand the character and special needs of each prisoner and that they should be capable of exerting a wholesome moral influence. The selection of the staff should be governed by these considerations;
- (d) for the same reason, the number of inmates should remain within such bounds as to enable the director and senior officers of the staff to become thoroughly acquainted with each prisoner;
- (e) It is necessary to obtain the effective co-operation of the public in general and of the surrounding community in particular for the operation of open institutions. For this purpose it is therefore, among other things, necessary to inform the public of the aims and methods of each open institution, and also of the fact that the system applied in it requires a considerable moral effort on the part of the prisoner. In this connexion, local and national media of information may play a valuable part.

(VII) In applying the system of open institutions each country, with due regard for its particular social, economic and cultural conditions, should be guided by the following observations:

- (a) countries which are experimenting with the open system for the first time should refrain from laying down rigid and detailed regulations in advance for the operation of open institutions;
- (b) during the experimental stage they should be guided by the methods of organization and the procedure already found to be effective in countries which are more advanced in this respect.

(VIII) While in the open institution the risk of escape and the danger that the inmate may make improper use of his contacts with the outside world are admittedly greater than in other types of penal institutions, these disadvantages are amply outweighed by the following advantages, which make the open institution superior to the other types of institution:

- (a) the open institution is more favourable to the social readjustment of the prisoners and at the same time more conducive to their physical and mental health;
- (b) the flexibility inherent in the open system is expressed in a liberalization of the regulations; the tensions of prison life are relieved and discipline consequently improves. Moreover, the absence of material and physical constraint and the relations of greater confidence between prisoners and staff tend to create in the prisoners a genuine desire for social readjustment;
- (c) the conditions of life in open institutions resemble more closely those of normal life. Consequently, desirable contacts can more easily be arranged with the outside world and the inmate can thus be brought to realize that he has not severed all links with society; in this connexion it might perhaps be possible to arrange, for instance, group walks, sporting competitions with outside teams, and even individual leave of absence, particularly for the purpose of preserving family ties;
- (d) the same measure is less costly if applied in an open institution than in an institution of another type, in particular because of lower building costs and, in the case of an agricultural institution, the higher income obtained from cultivation, if cultivation is organized in a rational manner.

(IX) In conclusion, the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

- (a) considers that the open institution marks an important step in the development of modern prison systems and represents one of the most successful applications of the principle of the individualization of penalties with a view to social readjustment;
- (b) believes that the system of open institutions could contribute to decreasing the disadvantages of short-term sentences of imprisonment;
- (c) consequently recommends the extension of the open system to the largest possible number of prisoners, subject to the fulfilment of the conditions set forth in rules IV and VI, paragraph (d) above;
- (d) recommends the compilation of statistics which will make it possible to assess, from the point of view of recidivism and social rehabilitation, the results of treatment in open institutions.

This archiving project is a collaborative effort between United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology. Any comments or questions should be directed to Cindy J. Smith at [CJSmithphd@comcast.net](mailto:CJSmithphd@comcast.net) or Emil Wandzilak at [emil.wandzilak@unodc.org](mailto:emil.wandzilak@unodc.org).