

UNITED NATIONS
Department of Public Information
Press and Publications Division
United Nations, N. Y.

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Press Release SOC/2099
22 August 1955

UN CONGRESS ON PREVENTION OF CRIME ELECTS OFFICERS

(The following is based on information received from the UN Information Center, Geneva.)

The first United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders convened today in Geneva. Edouard de Steiger, former Federal Councillor and former President of the Swiss Confederation, was elected President of the Congress.

With some 475 specialists participating, the meetings will consider juvenile delinquency, the treatment of prisoners, the selection and training of correctional personnel and the question of prison labor and of open institutions. It is expected to continue through 3 September.

The Congress was opened by Adrian Pelt, Director of the European Office of the United Nations, on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Upon his election, Mr. de Steiger expressed the hope that international collaboration would be further promoted as a result of the Congress and that the Congress itself would accomplish a juridical and social task essential to the well-being and security of peoples everywhere.

Manuel Lopez-Rey, Chief of the Social Defense Section of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, pointed out that the Congress' recommendations would be presented by the Secretary-General to the Social Commission of the Economic and Social Council, which would take appropriate decisions to give the maximum effect to them. Mr. Lopez-Rey will represent the Secretary-General throughout the conference.

The Congress also elected the following Vice-Presidents: Fernand Arsenies, Procureur General Pres La Cour de Cassation, Lebanon; Paul Cornil, Secetaire General du Ministere de la Justice, President de L'Association Internationale de Droit Penal, Belgium; Sir Lionel Fox, Chairman of the Prison Commission, United Kingdom; William P. Rogers, Deputy Attorney General of the United States; Evelie Tabie y de Castro Palomine, Supreme Court Judge, Cuba; and Shri Paripurnanand Verma, President of the All-India Crime Prevention Society, India.

As Honorary Vice-Presidents the Congress elected: Sanford Bates (US), Adolphe Delierneux (Belgium), Karl Schlyter (Sweden), and Mostafa el Said (Egypt).

The work of the Congress, it was decided, would be divided among three sections, dealing with standard minimum rules for treatment of prisoners, open institutions, and prevention of juvenile delinquency.

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The texts of both sets of rules were submitted by the Secretariat and modified only slightly by the more than 500 specialists from 66 countries and territories attending the Congress. The two texts will now go forward as a recommendation to the Social Commission of the Economic and Social Council.

The standard rules on the treatment of prisoners state that imprisonment should have as its purpose "to establish in them the will to lead law-abiding and self-supporting lives after their release and to fit them to do so. The treatment shall be such as will encourage their self-respect and develop their sense of responsibility." To these ends, the rules state, "all appropriate means shall be used" including education, vocational guidance, and training, employment counselling, physical developing and strengthening of moral character.

The rules on treatment represent "the minimum conditions which are accepted as suitable by the United Nations." As to their application, the Congress recommended that they be applied impartially without discrimination, while at the same time respecting "the religious beliefs and moral precepts of the group to which a prisoner belongs."

The minimum rules touch on most aspects of prison life including accommodations, hygiene, clothing, food, exercise, medical services, discipline, etc. and are applicable to all categories of prisoners, criminal or civil, untried or convicted. A special section of rules, however, apply to "special categories" of prisoners, such as those under sentence, insane and mentally abnormal prisoners, prisoners under arrest or awaiting trial and civil prisoners.

In a preliminary observation to the rules, the Congress states that the rules do not seek to regulate the management of institutions set aside for young persons, although the general rules would apply. "In principle," the Congress states, "young persons should not be sentenced to imprisonment. Where this is unavoidable, every precaution should be taken to separate them from other prisoners ... where they should receive a treatment similar so far as is possible to that applied in training schools."

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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 or Emil Wandzilak at emil.wandzilak@unodc.org.