

Stop Crime

The Ninth United Nations Congress on
the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

United Nations Crime Congresses

Held every five years, the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders is the major global forum for exchanging information and experiences, comparing criminal justice practices, finding viable solutions to crime and stimulating international action. Crime Congresses bring together representatives of the world's national Governments, specialists in crime prevention and criminal justice, scholars of international repute and members of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Their recommendations, issued through the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, impact on the legislative bodies of the United Nations — the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — and on the criminal justice policies and practices of national and local governments.

The quinquennial Crime Congresses continue a tradition established by the former International Penal and Penitentiary Commission (IPPC). Comprising experts and professionals from mostly European countries, the IPPC held congresses every five years from 1885 to 1910 and from 1925 to 1935, and during the latter period was affiliated with the League of Nations. The IPPC was dissolved by General Assembly resolution 415 (V) of 1 December 1950, and its functions and archives were transferred to the UN in 1951.

From an early focus on penology and treatment of juvenile offenders, the scope of the UN Crime Congresses has broadened to include issues such as the relation between crime control and social and economic development and international responses to transnational crime.

First Congress

The First Congress convened in 1955 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Predominantly concerned with treatment of juvenile delinquents and the treatment of prisoners — the numbers in both categories had risen dramatically in post-war Europe — the First Congress looked into the possibilities of "open" penal and correctional institutions, the selection and training of prison personnel and the proper use of prison labour. It was attended by 512 persons from 61 countries and territories, observers and representatives from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and 235 individual participants.

The Congress approved a set of Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, based on IPPC revisions of standards endorsed by the League of Nations. The Standard Minimum Rules were later approved by the UN Economic and Social Council, and became a prototype for international models, standards, norms and guidelines affecting the administration of criminal justice.

Second Congress

Crime resulting from social changes accompanying rapid economic development, including juvenile delinquency, was at the centre of attention of the Crime Congress held in London in 1960. The range of issues discussed was broader than at the First Congress: special police services to prevent juvenile delinquency, the impact of the mass media on juvenile deviancy, the role of national planning in preventing crime, questions of short-term imprisonment and prison labour, and released prisoners' transition to community life.



Third Congress

Newly independent third world nations appeared for the first time in large numbers at the 1965 Third Congress in Stockholm. Representatives of 74 participating Governments, and over 1,000 participants in all, developed policy on the relation between social change and criminality, community action for preventing crime, reduction of recidivism, probation policies and special preventive and treatment measures for juveniles and young adults.

Fourth Congress

The Fourth Congress, held at Kyoto, Japan, in 1970, was the first held outside Europe. "Crime and development" was the overall theme, and special emphasis was given to incorporation of prevention policies into development planning, research on social defence policies and community-based prevention.

The Congress also discussed nation-by-nation implementation of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. A survey of Member States found the Rules had contributed to advancing basic human rights for millions of prisoners.

Fifth Congress

"Crime prevention and control — the challenge of the last quarter of the century" was the theme of the Fifth Congress, held in Geneva. Nearly 1,000 representatives of 101 countries and numerous organizations looked into the changing forms and dimensions of national and transnational crime and violence, including the role of organized crime in apparently legitimate businesses, criminality stemming from drug and alcohol abuse, and terrorism. The concept of victim compensation was discussed.

The 1975 Congress adopted recommendations on the abuse of economic power, drug traffic, terrorism, theft and destruction of cultural property, interpersonal violence and changing expectations of police performance. It approved a Declaration against the use of torture, which was adopted later that year by the General Assembly and in 1987 entered into force as an international convention. The convention obliges States parties to make torture a crime, prosecute offences and punish those found guilty. The Fifth Congress also laid the basis for the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, adopted by the General Assembly in 1979.

Sixth Congress

In 1980 the Crime Congress met in a developing country — Venezuela — for the first time. It was presented with the first detailed worldwide survey of crime, based on information received by the UN from 65 Member States. The study revealed that the great majority of both developed and developing countries were facing an escalation of violence and criminality, that crime was taking new forms and dimensions, and that traditional measures of prevention and control were under duress.

"Crime prevention and the quality of life" was the overall theme. UN norms and guidelines were recognized as important tools for Governments in dealing effectively with crime while preserving human rights. Juvenile justice was placed in the context of assured social justice for all children, and crime was examined in relation to abuses of power.

Emerging from the Congress was the Caracas Declaration, the first comprehensive document to link crime prevention to a broad range of human concerns and efforts. The Declaration, with its recommendations for standard minimum rules for juvenile justice, public participation in crime prevention, improved statistics and eradication of extralegal executions, was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1980.

Seventh Congress

The theme of the 1985 Congress, in Milan, Italy, was "Crime prevention for freedom, justice, peace and development". Its major final document, the Milan Plan of Action, was subsequently approved by the UN General Assembly. The Plan of Action detailed a worldwide programme for prevention and criminal justice, including allocation of resources, action-oriented research and technical assistance to developing countries.

The Congress approved five other instruments that set standards for building crime prevention into development planning, the administration of juvenile justice, justice for crime victims, the independence of the judiciary and the transfer and treatment of foreign prisoners.

Eighth Congress

The site of the United Nations Crime Congress returned to Latin America in 1990, as the Congress convened in the Palacio de Convenciones in Havana. Over 1,400 participants from

127 countries discussed theft of archaeological treasures, the dumping of hazardous wastes in ocean waters, the burgeoning international trade in illicit drugs and the lethal connection between drug abuse and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and the prevalence of both among prison populations.

The Congress disseminated information on criminal justice computer networks, provisions for seizing the financial proceeds of organized crime and examining bank records, and the growing body of experience relating crime control to socio-economic development. The Congress also reviewed the development of community-based crime prevention and non-custodial alternatives to prison.

The Eighth Congress produced more international instruments than all the preceding Congresses combined. Among these were five model treaties — draft bilateral agreements that can guide national Governments in their negotiations. The model treaties covered extradition, mutual assistance in criminal investigations, transfer of proceedings in criminal prosecutions, transfer of supervision of offenders and prevention of crimes infringing on the cultural heritage of peoples.

The Congress also adopted a resolution calling for an intergovernmental working group to review the UN's crime prevention and criminal justice programme. The findings of the working group became the basis for a Ministerial Summit convened in Versailles, France, in 1991, and the even-

tual replacement of the UN Committee on Crime Prevention and Control by a new Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

Ninth Congress

Set to meet 29 April–8 May 1995 in Cairo, Egypt, the Ninth Congress will further develop the UN's portfolio of criminal justice concerns. Heading the agenda will be plans to combat transnational crime syndicates and economic crime through stronger international cooperation and tighter controls on money laundering. There will be discussion aimed at defining the new legal realm of crimes against the environment, and of strategies to be used against violent crime, urban crime, crime among young people and violence inflicted on women. In the realm of technical assistance, attention will focus on helping developing countries to strengthen their criminal justice systems.

Preparations for the Ninth Congress included regional meetings held in 1994 in Bangkok, Thailand; Kampala, Uganda; Vienna, Austria; San José, Costa Rica; and Amman, Jordan. The Ninth Congress' consideration of organized crime will benefit from the achievements of two other 1994 meetings: the International Conference on Laundering and Controlling Proceeds of Crime, held in Courmayeur, Italy, 17-21 June; and the World Ministerial Conference on Organized Transnational Crime, which took place in Naples, Italy, 21-23 November.

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.