



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Statement on Nelson Mandela International Day

Today is a day for celebration of Nelson Mandela's outstanding contribution to the world. His legacy burns brightly, and like a torch, will be passed from generation to generation in the 21st century. In December 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the revised UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners—one of the most significant developments in modern international law.

These rules represent an updated blueprint for prison management in the 21st century which upholds and promotes prisoners' dignity. As a tribute to the late South African President's own experience of 27 years of imprisonment in the course of his long struggle for global human rights, equality, democracy and a culture of peace, the UNGA named the revised rules the Nelson Mandela Rules.

Starting this year, the day also draws attention to the often forgotten prison population of over 10.3 million people worldwide, as well as to those entrusted with their custody. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) joins today's call for humane prison conditions, for prisoners being part of society and for valuing prison staff.

A lot of prisons are in crisis. Many are overcrowded, others are inadequate. Across the world, prisoners face health risks, violence, high rates of recidivism, as well as emerging threats, such as violent extremism in prisons. All of these challenges have added to the complexity of combining security, safety and human dignity within prison systems.

As the guardian of the Nelson Mandela Rules, UNODC is responsible for providing technical assistance and advisory services to Member States in the field of penal reform. To achieve this goal, UNODC recently launched a new Global Programme on Addressing Prison Challenges, which aims to reduce the scope of imprisonment; strengthen prison management and improve prison conditions; and facilitate the social integration of prisoners upon release.

On Nelson Mandela International Day, I call on every country to join UNODC in ensuring that these rules make a difference to the lives of prisoners globally. UNODC stands ready to assist. We must, at all times, have in mind the plight of prisoners, and undertake concrete action to treat them with respect and dignity, including every effort to encourage their rehabilitation.