



Promising Practices to Reduce the Harmful Impact of Imprisonment on Women – a key step forward in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Side Event at the Commission on the Status of Women, March 2025
Concept Note and Agenda

CSW Priority Theme: Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Date: 17 March 2025, 10 am – 11.15 am

Location: Room CR9, United Nations

To Register: Event will be in person but a recording will be made available to those who cannot attend in person

Background

Over 740,000 women and girls are held in prison worldwide. Women continue to make up a [minority](#) of the global prison population at 7%. However, women’s incarceration is growing at a faster rate than men, up 60% since 2000 compared to 22% for men. Around 19,000 children are living in prison with their mothers. The [Justice for Women High-level Group](#) report had found that discriminatory social norms, compounded by other disadvantages such as poverty, were powerful obstacles to equal rights. Indeed, research shows that poverty is a driving factor behind the increasing number of women in prison, despite the devastating impact of imprisonment on women and their families, especially their children. Most women in prison globally are charged or convicted for non-violent offences. Many serve short prison sentences simply because they are unable to pay fines or to afford bail. Additionally, punitive drug policies are also a key driver of the rising number of women in prison, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is also linked to poverty and discrimination

Despite these stark numbers, the issues disproportionately impacting incarcerated women and girls have received minimal attention from high-level forums on women’s rights, such as CSW. The Human Rights Council resolution 53/27 of 2023 calls upon States to take immediate and effective action to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in criminal justice detention. In June this year, the UN Human Rights Office will submit a report on this issue to the Council. Halfway through the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, progress on SDG 5 and SDG 16 has been minimal. The linkages between these two Goals are significant and must be highlighted at high-level forums.

2025 also marks 15 years since the adoption of the Bangkok Rules, though implementation remains ineffective and inconsistent.

Side Event

This official side event at CSW, sponsored by the Missions of Colombia and Thailand to the United Nations and the Thailand Institute of Justice, and co-organized by Penal Reform International, Women Beyond Walls and the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, is one of the first to address how to reduce the harmful impact of imprisonment on women from a global perspective. It will highlight not only the link with poverty and the scale of the problem but also innovative solutions that Member States can adopt.

Penal Reform International and Women Beyond Walls will launch their report – the first global report on laws which criminalise women due to poverty. Civil society groups will share country cases studies about the impact of these laws and policies, highlighting the importance of people-centred justice which places women’s needs at the forefront of justice systems and processes. The event also provides an opportunity for States to share promising practices, such as the innovative law on non-custodial measures for women who are heads of households and have been charged with offences because of socio-economic circumstances in Colombia and the UK government’s sentencing review and Women’s Justice Board.

This side event will provide concrete recommendations for policy reform in light of international standards (such as the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders – The Bangkok Rules), the 2023 Human Rights Council [Resolution](#) on addressing violence against women in criminal justice detention, the UN Common Position on Incarceration, international and regional standards on the decriminalisation of petty offences, and 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Agenda

10.00 – 10.03 am <i>3 minutes</i>	Welcome remarks Fernando Marani , Program Director, Justice, Inclusion and Equality, Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies
10.03 – 10.15 <i>12 minutes</i>	Opening statements <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ambassador H.E. Mr. Cherdchai Chaivaivid, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations▪ Ambassador Arlene Tickner, Ambassador at large for Gender Issues and Feminist Global Policy, Government of Colombia
	Moderation: Jerome Mangelinckx , Global Policy Manager, Penal Reform International

<p>10.15 – 10.31 16 minutes</p>	<p>How poverty drives the criminalization of women and girls – perspectives from Colombia and the USA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Claudia Cardona, Mujeres Libres Colombia/ International Network of Formerly Incarcerated Women (video) ▪ Jhody Polk, Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative, USA
<p>10.31 – 10.44 13 minutes</p>	<p>Launch of report on Laws that Criminalise Women due to Poverty and Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sabrina Mahtani, Women Beyond Walls
<p>10.44 – 10.52 8 minutes</p>	<p>Celebrating 15 Years of the Bangkok Rules: Strengthening support for the global Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phiset Sa-ardyen, Executive Director, Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ)
<p>10.52 – 11.12 20 minutes</p>	<p>Audience Discussion</p>
<p>11.12 – 11.15 3 minutes</p>	<p>Way forward and concluding remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Jerome Mangelinckx, Global Policy Manager, Penal Reform International
<p>11.15 – 11.30 15 minutes</p>	<p>Networking</p>