



FIRST AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON HEALTH IN DETENTION

3–5 JULY 2024, NAIROBI, KENYA

It always seems impossible
until it's done. ”
– Nelson Mandela

THEME OF THE CONFERENCE

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE: AFRICAN SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVING HEALTH IN DETENTION

RATIONALE

The African continent is home to around 14.4% of the world population ([World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa](#)) and, according to various reports, ten of the world's 50 largest prison systems, or 20% ([World Prison Brief](#)). The median rate of incarceration varies considerably across the continent, from 44.5 per 100,000 for western African countries to 248 per 100,000 for southern African countries.¹

As is the case elsewhere, most people detained in Africa come from marginalized segments of society and are disproportionately subject to ill health while having less access to health-care services. In recent years, there has been a growing acknowledgement within African countries of the significance of prison health as a part of broader public health. Many countries are making incremental changes to their existing systems to improve governance in prison health, which is essential to reducing health inequalities and achieving better health outcomes for people deprived of their liberty. Workforce development and professionalization are priorities for several African prison services, and multiple national and international platforms to share good practices in prison-systems management are now in place at a regional and global level.

¹ Top ten largest prison systems in Africa: South Africa (12th largest globally, with 157,056 detainees), Egypt (14th, 120,000), Ethiopia (16th, 110,000), Morocco (19th, 100,004), Algeria (20th, 94,749), Rwanda (23rd, 89,034), Nigeria (27th, 77,849), Uganda (28th, 75,764), Kenya (37th, 58,887), Tanzania (50th, 32,671). Figures from World Prison Brief: <https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total>.



Effectively responding to health needs and protecting the right to health of people deprived of their liberty remains challenging. The performance of public health systems in many African countries is still suboptimal, owing to weaknesses in some or all of their structural components – namely leadership and governance, financing, human resources, medical products, health information systems and service delivery. Systemic shortcomings have a direct impact on the range and quality of health services. Places of detention often have fewer resources than community health services and struggle to ensure equality, let alone equity, of care.

In this document, “detention” refers to all types of places of detention, including penitentiaries, prisons, and police and military detention facilities that house civilians.

Health in detention cannot be looked at in isolation. It is part of and connected to the prison system, the judicial system, and the national health and social-welfare systems. General conditions of detention and prison management, lack of health-insurance coverage and other factors such as climate change may negatively affect detainees’ health. And in conflict-affected countries, people deprived of their liberty are particularly vulnerable. Prisons are often overcrowded due to rapid population growth, obsolete infrastructure, prevalence of pretrial detainees and other factors. Deteriorating prison infrastructure, poor water supply, high levels of malnutrition and inadequate sanitation are often a reality. Conflict deepens any existing issues a prison system faces and impedes the necessary reforms.

Health authorities, senior management, health-care staff and custodial workers involved in health in detention in Africa are crucial to finding practical, sustainable solutions for overcoming these challenges.



Through this conference, we will promote and encourage respect for the right to health of people deprived of their liberty, debate concerns, exchange ideas and insights, present research, propose contextualized solutions and, together with participants, put forward a vision for the development of stronger, integrated health systems in detention in African countries.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

1. Foster respect for international law – both international humanitarian law and international human rights law – and standards pertaining to health in detention
2. Promote a whole-of-government approach to health in detention
3. Improve the health outcomes of people deprived of their liberty by strengthening health systems in detention
4. Build on existing good policies and practices in and outside of Africa to bolster responses to infectious and non-communicable diseases and to health emergencies in detention
5. Showcase key achievements attained across the African continent since the First World Conference on Health in Detention in 2022, identify gaps in the implementation of that conference's recommendations and adopt measures to make further progress

SUGGESTED TOPICS

- Prioritizing the integration of international laws and standards on detention and health in national and regional policies while putting people deprived of their liberty at the centre
- Working towards stronger health systems in detention, integrated approaches and partnership
- Where we are on infectious and non-communicable diseases and what can be done to make a difference on the African continent
- Preparing for future health-security hazards, including climate change, food insecurity and emergencies in detention
- Health in detention in conflict environments
- Health determinants in health protection
- New technologies and innovations to improve health in detention

FORMAT

The three-day conference will feature plenary and symposium sessions, interactive workshops and a poster exhibition. The event is by invitation and will be held in person only.

LANGUAGE

The official language of the conference is English. Simultaneous interpretation in French will be provided.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Senior-management health staff from the ministries responsible for places of detention
- Senior-management staff from the ministries responsible for places of detention
- Senior representatives of correctional services departments

- Officials from ministries/departments of health
- Academics and public-health scientists
- Representatives of regional and international organizations working in detention
- People who have formerly been detained and/or organizations representing their interests

ORGANIZER

The conference will be organized by the ICRC and co-hosted by the Kenya State Department for Correctional Services.

The ICRC is an **impartial, neutral and independent** organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to **protect the lives and dignity** of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to **provide them with assistance**.

The aim of the ICRC's work in detention, notably its Health in Detention programme, is to ensure that the dignity and well-being of people deprived of their liberty are respected and that their conditions of detention are in line with the law and internationally recognized standards. The ICRC acts to ensure that detaining authorities respect detainees' right to receive appropriate health care at all stages of their detention. As of 2024, the ICRC is working in some 30 African countries and carrying out its detention-related activities in almost all of the countries where it is present.




IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

- Ministry of Health of Kenya
- Kenya Red Cross Society
- Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
- African Correctional Services Association
- International Corrections and Prisons Association

The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners.



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