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PRAWA AND NPS: REFORMING NIGERIAN PRISONS

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The Nigerian Prison Survey Reports which were presented to stakeholders in Abuja on February 1, 2018 signify a landmark achievement in the Security and Justice sector.

Following the success of the presentation, the National Assembly is already working actively on some of the findings and recommendations contained in the Reports as the relevant House Committees have been mandated by the House of Representatives to conduct investigative hearing on Prison reforms.

The document which highlights key areas for penal reform originated from a collaboration between PRAWA and the Nigerian Prisons Service. The presentation saw in attendance, dignitaries including the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo SAN ably represented by the Honourable Minister of the Interior, Lt. General AB Dambazzau (Rtd), the Controller-General of Prisons, the Heads of Foreign Missions in Nigeria, Members of the National Assembly and the Heads of some Security and Justice Sector Institutions, amongst others.

One of the key recommendations of the reports is the urgent need to develop framework and clear indicators for assessing and understanding the 'true' cost of imprisonment (including the cost of excessive use of pre-trial detention), in terms of both the direct and indirect costs. In addition, the reports recommend the assessment of these costs on the basis of its impacts on the prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families, the primary and secondary victims, the prison officers, other criminal justice agencies, the community, the States and the country as a whole.

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It is important to note, that as at Monday February 26, 2018, inmate population stands at 71,642 and of this number, 49,001 representing 68.4% are awaiting trial persons (ATP) while 22,641 representing 31.6% are convicted inmates. Of the total number of convicts, 2,322 inmates are on death row.

It is expected, that the results from the assessments would, on one hand, provide key policy makers and practitioners, deepened evidences on the dangerous mix of poverty and overuse of prison custody especially for pre-trial detainees, minor offenders, juveniles, drug users and mentally ill persons, and also, show how these conflict with the law

It is also hoped that the evidences and the understanding will promote an evidence-based and effective interventions that are geared towards the use of prison custody as a last resort. The major interventions should aim at preventing offending and re-offending behavior, through prison and community based approaches. Thus, further enhance security, stability and development in the country.

The survey findings indicate that most of prisoners found are from poor backgrounds as reflected in the level of education and type/status of employment of their parents.

Under the Security and Justice Reform Project (SJRP), funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, PRAWA has implemented several significant actions under its ongoing Prison Reform Project. One critical area which is being looked into is the Budgeting for Women and Other Vulnerable Prisoners component.

You must agree, that consideration for the vulnerable groups in prison is of prime importance; given the scale of specialized care and attention required by pregnant women, nursing mothers, the elderly, people with terminal illnesses, the mentally ill, juvenile offenders and more. The Nigeria Prisons Service is working with PRAWA as technical partner to include the unique and specific needs of these groups in the annual prison budget.

As a key player in the security and justice sector, PRAWA works to promote institutional reforms for access to justice, rehabilitation, and social development of prisoners, ex-prisoners, torture victims and youth at risk. PRAWA has observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

In 2019, it will be celebrating twenty-five years of socially-conscious and justice-oriented, high-impact operation in Africa.

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