



ZAMBIA

# Unjust and Unhealthy

HIV, TB, and Abuse in Zambian Prisons

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# Unjust and Unhealthy

## HIV, TB, and Abuse in Zambian Prisons

In *Unjust and Unhealthy: HIV, TB, and Abuse in Zambian Prisons*, the Prisons Care and Counselling Association, the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa, and Human Rights Watch describe how inhuman and degrading conditions, poor or non-existent medical care, ill-treatment, and corporal punishment, combined with criminal justice system failures, have created a human rights crisis in Zambian prisons.

Overcrowding in Zambia's prisons is so severe that inmates sleep seated; food provision is so inadequate that food is traded for sex; corporal punishment is common. For punishment, prisoners are sometimes placed in a dark cell, naked, with water on the floor, for days at a time with minimal food. Medical care is almost non-existent: The Zambia Prisons Service employs only 14 health staff to serve 15,300 inmates. Whether or not inmates can access routine and even emergency health care is dependent upon the decision of prison officers with no medical training, and is constrained by a lack of staff, prison vehicles, and fuel for transportation. While HIV testing and treatment have improved at some prisons in recent years, tuberculosis screening and care remain grossly inadequate. Compounding poor conditions and health are criminal justice system failures that keep prisoners incarcerated needlessly for years: Over one third of Zambia's prisoners have never been convicted of any crime, but are held on remand or as immigration detainees. On their release from prison, prisoners carry untreated—and in some cases, drug-resistant—diseases back to their communities.

The Zambian government should recognize prison conditions and health as a national crisis. It must eliminate abusive punishments, support initiatives to scale up prison medical services, and improve conditions to conform to international standards. The government should enact basic criminal justice reforms to increase the use of bail, decrease arbitrary arrest, and increase the use of non-custodial sentences and parole. International agencies and donors need to prioritize prison health and support the government and non-governmental organizations in improving conditions, medical care, and justice for prisoners.

*The door of a cell at Lusaka Central Prison, Zambia. With only small holes for ventilation and light, tuberculosis spreads rapidly.*

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