

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS OF PRISON OVERCROWDING AND A CALL FOR AN ALTERNATIVE

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Sri Lanka faces a critical issue of prison overcrowding, with facilities operating well beyond capacity, driven by prolonged pretrial detentions, the incarceration of individuals for minor offenses, and inadequate infrastructure to accommodate the expanding inmate population. This crisis leads to numerous human rights violations and substandard living conditions for inmates: Prisoners are denied adequate food, water, sanitation, and healthcare, violating the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, while overcrowding increasing violence, disease transmission, and mental health issues. In this background this research proposes implementing a House Arrest System of certain offenders as an alternative where eligible inmates serve their sentences under strict electronic monitoring in their homes, ensuring compliance through regular check-ins with authorities. The author argues this approach would help reduce prison populations while still holding offenders accountable, for the researcher argues that it would free up limited prison resources to focus on violent and high-risk offenders. The research acknowledges potential challenges, including, monitoring requirements, and consequences for violations, ensuring equal application of the program, preventing abuse, and maintaining public confidence in the justice system. It recommends robust legislation, judicial oversight, and a comprehensive monitoring system to mitigate these risks. The research, moreover, discusses the potential cost savings and social benefits of reducing the prison population by selectively diverting certain offenders to community-based sentences, it has the potential to improve outcomes for inmates, reduce costs, and enhance public safety. Further it discusses recommended strategies for prison overcrowding in Sri Lanka and International practices followed by different countries that succeeded. In conclusion, the Researcher argues that the adoption of a Home Confinement system presents a promising solution to Sri Lanka's prison overcrowding crisis. By addressing human rights concerns and enhancing public safety, this approach aligns with international standards while fostering community integration and rehabilitation. Further research and pilot programs are, in addition, recommended to assess feasibility and optimize implementation in Sri Lanka's evolving legal landscape.

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