

U.S. prison population has doubled in 12 years

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States could soon surpass Russia to become the nation with highest rate of imprisonment.

According to a new Justice Department survey, the number of jailed Americans more than doubled over the past 12 years and reached its highest level ever last year.

At mid-1998, jails and prisons held an estimated 1.8 million people, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report released Sunday. At the end of 1985, the figure was 744,208.

There were 668 inmates for every 100,000 U.S. residents as of June 1998, compared

with 313 inmates per 100,000 people in 1985.

In Russia, 685 people out of every 100,000 are behind bars, according to The Sentencing Project, a U.S. group critical of the general trend toward harsher sentencing of American criminals.

A planned amnesty of 100,000 prisoners in Russia and the expectation of continued increases in the U.S. inmate population means the United States probably will become the world's leading jailer within the next two years, said Jenni Gainsborough, a Sentencing Project spokeswoman.

The number of people imprisoned in the

United States has grown for more than a quarter-century, helped by increased drug prosecutions and a general get-tough policy on all classes of offenders.

More criminals serving longer sentences led the inmate population to top 1 million in 1990; it has continued to rise.

About two-thirds of the nation's inmates are in state and federal prisons; the remaining one-third are in local jails.

Prisons generally hold convicted criminals sentenced to terms longer than one year, while jails typically keep those awaiting trial and those sentenced to 12 months or less.

In the June 1998 Justice Department survey, 1.2 million people were held in prisons, while local jails held about 600,000 men and women.

Local jails also supervised more than 72,000 people under various outside work, treatment or home detention programs.

The survey showed the total number of people behind bars grew by 4.4 percent from June 1997.

Between the end of 1990 and mid-1998, the incarcerated population grew an average 6.2 percent annually, said the report's author, statistician Darrell Gilliard.

Many prisons accused of subjecting female inmates to abuse

WASHINGTON (IPS) — Women inmates in U.S. prisons are subject to a "shocking array" of sexual and physical abuse, according to a 125-page report released earlier this month by Amnesty International.

Such abuse includes rape and other sexual violations by prison guards and male prisoners, the use of shackles during childbirth, and inadequate medical care, according to "Not Part of My Sentence."

The new report came just four days before International Women's Day on March 8 and is part of an unprecedented series by the London-based human rights group on abuses in the United States.

Much of the series focuses on abuses committed against inmates, including children, in U.S. jails.

"The sexual abuse of women inmates is torture, plain and simple," said William Schulz, director of the U.S. chapter of Amnesty. "Shackling and medical neglect of women in prison constitutes cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. These human rights violations must not stand."

Some 138,000 women served time in U.S. jails and prisons in 1997, more than three times the number of women inmates in 1985.

The skyrocketing rate of

female imprisonment is due mainly to the impact of the so-called "war against drugs," according to Amnesty.

About 25 percent of women inmates today are in prison for committing a violent crime, while some 40 percent are serving time for violating drug laws, many of which require "mandatory minimum" sentences regardless of any mitigating circumstances.

These laws have resulted in an explosion of the prison population — both male and female — in the United States.

But the growth in the number of female inmates over the last 12 years has risen at an average of 11.2 percent a year since 1985, while the number of male inmates rose by an average of about 7.9 percent.

As in the rest of the American penal system, minorities make up a disproportionate share of the women's prison population, as they do among men.

For every White woman serving a prison term, there are four Hispanic and eight African-American women.

Women's correctional facilities — and particularly the training and employment of women guards — have not kept pace with the soaring inmate population.

As a result, prisons often permit men to guard women

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inmates, contrary to international standards.

Some 70 percent of guards employed in federal women's correctional facilities — which must generally meet higher standards than state or county prisons — are men. Moreover, 12 states have no laws criminalizing sexual contact between prison staff and women inmates, the report reveals.

Amnesty said it received many reports of sexual abuse of inmates by staff. At one prison in California, for example, Amnesty researchers interviewed prisoners who reported that some male officers watched them dress and groped their breasts and genital areas during routine pat-down searches.

In addition, women inmates also are subject to sexually and racially abusive language by male staff, according to the report.

Abuses can be even more serious. Guards have been found responsible for rape of women inmates in some 14

states, including two cases in which the rapes resulted in the impregnation of the victims. Under international law, rape of a prisoner by correctional staff is considered to be an act of torture.

Amnesty found 96 cases since 1992 in which guards have been either criminally convicted, fired or disciplined in some other way for sexually abusing women inmates.

But cases in which strong action by the authorities followed abuse may be the exception rather than the rule as women who report abuse often suffer retribution.

In addition to sexual abuse, the report documents the use of shackles and other physical restraints on women inmates, regardless of whether they have a history of violence or escape attempts, when they are transported to and from hospitals and during their hospital stays for medical treatment and even childbirth.

In 1997-98, more than

2,200 pregnant women were put in prison, and more than 1,300 babies were born there.

Restraints, according to medical experts, endanger both the mother and her baby during labor and delivery and prevent the mother from adequately caring for her baby, according to the report.

About 80,000 women — more than one-half of the total female inmate population in the United States — are the mothers of some 200,000

children under the age of 18, and the great majority of them lived with their children before they were incarcerated, according to the report.

"If the mothers of more than 200,000 children in this country have been abused or mistreated while in prison, if their health has been broken, that will have a profound effect on their ability to care for those children, and that will affect every one of us," Schulz said.

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the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) at a mall near you to plan how we and future generations - will travel in Clark County.

The Purpose....

is to review and discuss alternatives for the proposed Las Vegas Fixed Guideway System and other transportation projects in the valley. Transportation projects featured at the fair will include: the fixed guideway system, expanded bus service, alternative transportation programs and opportunities, and street & highway projects.

In Addition to the RTC....

other participating agencies will include the Nevada Department of Transportation, Clark County Public Works, and the City of Las Vegas. These agencies will be present to answer questions about projects such as the Spaghetti Bowl, US-95, the Las Vegas Beltway and the California-Nevada Super Speed Train.

When and Where....

Saturday, March 20, 10:00am - 7:00pm
Sunday, March 21, 11:00am - 6:00pm
 Boulevard Mall, 3528 S. Maryland Parkway - Disney Court

Saturday, March 27, 10:00am - 7:00pm
Sunday, March 28, 11:00am - 6:00pm
 Galleria at Sunset, 1300 Sunset Road, Henderson
 Robinsons-May Court, 1st floor

For More Information....

call the RTC Resort Corridor Project staff at 455-2152.

A sign language interpreter can be made available by calling 455-4481 or TDD 455-5997 48 hours in advance.

CAT services all fair locations. Call CAT-RIDE (228-7433) for route and schedule information.

The Battle of Fort Pillow and the Birth of the KKK

is a documentary about the massacre of over 250 Black men, women and children. Known as the first Grand Wizard of the Klu Klux Klan, General Nathan Bedford Forrest ordered the needless manslaughter of freed slaves seeking refuge at Fort Pillow.

Directed and produced by Stan Armstrong will air on Tuesday, March 23 at 9 p.m. on KLVX Channel 10.



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