

Realizing the Rights of Prisoners with Disabilities in Nigeria: A Case Study of Four Lagos State Prisons

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Abstract : Nigeria signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010, which was heralded as a much-needed step towards protecting the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs). However, even with such progress, incarcerated PWDs have been left behind. The current legal framework in Nigeria does not consider the particular challenges PWDs face in prison nor make provisions to address them, despite the need for such reforms. Indeed, given the closed and restricted nature of prisons, and the violence that results from overcrowding, lack of supervision, and poor facilities, prisoners with disabilities often face significant challenges while incarcerated. While every prisoner is affected by these issues, PWDs are disproportionately harmed by them due to the nature of their disability. A study of four prisons in Lagos State, Nigeria was carried out by interviewing prisoners with disabilities, prison officials, advocates, and academics. The study found that for prisoners with physical disabilities, inaccessible prison facilities and a lack of mobility, hearing, or seeing assistance can often cause them to be dependent on the mercy of the other inmates for assistance in performing such basic functions as using the restroom, going to church, or washing themselves. Prison officials do not assist these PWDs or provide them with aids, such as crutches or a cane. Relatedly, prisoners with psychosocial disabilities (mental health conditions) often are not removed to health care facilities, despite a law to that effect, and are left to languish in prisons without the mental health care treatment they need. This presentation argues that reforms addressing the rights of PWDs must consider and make provisions for prisoners with disabilities, such as ensuring that prison facilities are accessible, providing PWDs with mobility, seeing or hearing aids as needed, and conducting mental health screenings for persons awaiting trial immediately upon entering the prison. These reforms, among others, are necessary first steps toward realizing the rights of prisoners with disabilities in Nigeria.

Keywords : disability rights, human rights, Lagos, Nigeria, prisoners with disabilities

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