



Press Statement

Indigenous Overincarceration Crisis Hits Record Numbers

January 22, 2020 (Ottawa, ON) - The proportion of Indigenous people behind bars has hit a record high, according to new figures from Dr. Ivan Zinger, the Correctional Investigator of Canada.

Indigenous people are 5 per cent of Canada's population¹, but they make up a shocking 30 per cent of inmates in federal custody, an increase from 25 per cent only four years ago. These figures are even worse for Indigenous women, who make up 42 per cent of the women in federal prisons.

Dr. Zinger notes that the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) contributes to these "disturbing and entrenched imbalances" as Indigenous inmates are more likely to be put into maximum security, to be involved in use of force incidents and, historically, to be placed in segregation². Even though they enter rehabilitative programs more quickly and complete them at higher rates than other prisoners, Indigenous offenders are released later and have their release revoked more often.³

"Canada locks up Indigenous people at a rate six times higher than the rest of the population. That is shameful," notes Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) National Chief Robert Bertrand. "CAP has been speaking out about this issue for over forty years now. No leader in Canada can claim ignorance about this crisis."

Not only do Indigenous people struggle with economic inequality, discrimination and the legacy of residential schools, but research shows they are also treated more harshly at every stage of the justice system^{4 5}.

"Elders and communities have to be involved in people's healing," says CAP Vice-Chief Kim Beaudin, "and we need to give them the tools they need to re-integrate into their communities." Both CAP and the Office of the Correctional Investigator have called for a national strategy on gang disaffiliation, an increase in the funding and availability of Indigenous-specific programming and an increased number of healing lodges.

"CSC seems to think their current policies are enough to deal with this crisis and reverse the trends of overincarceration, but things aren't getting better," says National Chief Bertrand. "They are getting worse."

The statement from the Office of the Correctional Investigator is available at <https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20200121-eng.aspx>

¹ 2016 Census. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

² Office of the Correctional Investigator. "Indigenous People in Federal Custody Surpasses 30% Correctional Investigator Issues Statement and Challenge" Jan 21, 2020

³ Annual Report of the Correctional Investigator, 2018-19

⁴ Bracken, Denis C., Deane, Lawrence & Morrissette, Larry (2009) Desistance and social marginalization: The case of Canadian Aboriginal offenders, *Theoretical Criminology*, 13 (1): 61-78. 2009: 66.

⁵ Tauri, Juan M. & Porou, Ngati (2014) Criminal Justice as a Colonial Project in Settler-Colonialism, *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 8 (1): 20-37.

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The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples is the national voice representing the interests of Métis, status and non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit Indigenous People living off-reserve. Today, over 70% of Indigenous people live off-reserve.