



News Release / Communiqué

For Immediate Release

The Changing Face of Canada's Prisons: Correctional Investigator Reports on Ethno-Cultural Diversity in Corrections

OTTAWA, November, 26 2013 – The 40th Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator was tabled in Parliament today. The report contains a special focus on ethno-cultural diversity in corrections.

In releasing his report, the Correctional Investigator, Mr. Howard Sapers, noted that recent inmate population growth is almost exclusively driven by increases in the composition of ethnically and culturally diverse offenders. Over the past 10 years, the Aboriginal incarcerated population increased by 46.4% while visible minority groups (e.g. Black, Asian, Hispanic) increased by almost 75%. During this same time period, the population of Caucasian inmates actually declined by 3%. Nearly one-in-four visible minority inmates are foreign-born, many practice religious faiths other than Christianity and a number speak languages other than English or French. “Accommodating ethnic, cultural, language and religious diversity and facilitating meaningful participation in correctional programs and community reintegration for these offenders poses significant challenges for the Correctional Service of Canada,” said Sapers.

Diversity in corrections reflects larger demographic trends in Canadian society. However, there are some groups that are disproportionately over-represented in federal penitentiaries and growing at alarming rates. For example, 9.5% of federal inmates today are Black (an increase of 80% since 2003/04), yet Black Canadians account for less than 3% of the total Canadian population. Aboriginal people represent a staggering 23% of federal inmates yet comprise 4.3% of the total Canadian population. One-in-three women under federal sentence are Aboriginal. “These are disturbing trends that raise important questions about equality and our justice system in Canada,” added Sapers.

Taken as a whole, visible minority inmates often have better correctional outcomes when compared to the total offender population. Over the last 7 years, on average, less than 5% of visible minority inmates have been readmitted within two years of their warrant expiry date. The rate for the general population is 10.1%. Notwithstanding, visible minority inmates face considerable challenges. A case study conducted by the Office in 2012-13 on the experiences of Black inmates under federal custody found that they are over-represented in maximum security and segregation, incur a disproportionate number of institutional charges, and are more likely to be involved in use of force incidents.

The report points out that discriminatory behaviour and prejudicial attitudes by some CSC staff were reported as common experiences among many Black inmates. “CSC needs to do a better job of recruiting and retaining a more diverse front-line and program delivery staff, especially in institutions which house the greatest proportion of visible minority offenders,” stated Sapers.

The Correctional Investigator recommends that CSC develop a national Diversity Awareness Training Plan to provide practical and operational training in the areas of diversity, sensitivity and cultural competency. Sapers also recommends the establishment of an Ethnicity Liaison Officer responsible for building and maintaining linkages with culturally diverse community groups and organizations which at present are very limited.

Other sections of the 2012-13 Annual Report address ongoing priorities of the Office – mental health care, prevention of deaths in custody, conditions of confinement, issues affecting Aboriginal and women offenders and access to correctional programs.

As the ombudsman for federally sentenced offenders, the Office of the Correctional Investigator serves Canadians and contributes to safe, lawful and humane corrections through independent oversight of the Correctional Service of Canada by providing accessible, impartial and timely investigation of individual and systemic concerns. The report cited in this release is available at: www.oci-bec.gc.ca.

For more information, please contact:

Ivan Zinger, J.D., Ph.D.
Executive Director and General Counsel
(613) 990-2690
Ivan.Zinger@oci-bec.gc.ca