



Contact:
Box: LG 404 Legon
Phone: +233 024 435 0266
+233 0302 784 294
Fax: (0302) 763028/9

95 Nortei Ababio Loop,
North Airport Res. Area,
Accra-GHANA

**GHANA CENTER FOR
DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT**

Facebook: facebook.com/CDDGhana
Twitter: @CDDGha

PRESS RELEASE

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CDD-Ghana Calls for Juvenile Justice Reforms, Protection of Rights of Juvenile Offenders

Africa's youth bulge presents opportunities as well as many challenges. The total population of the African continent stands at 1.28 billion, 41% of which are under 15 years. In Ghana, about 40% of the population is under 15 years. Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, drug abuse, petty crime and anti-social behaviors often lead children in conflict with the law. Globally the number of young people coming in conflict with the law is growing at a rapid rate and the situation is not any different in Ghana. However, there are significant challenges in responding to this rise.

In 2003, Ghana's 4th Parliament of the 4th Republic passed the Juvenile Justice Act, 2003 (Act 653) with the aim to provide for an alternative criminal justice system to protect the rights of children in conflict with the law. The law further sought to provide for younger offenders in accordance with international standards based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the administration of Juvenile Justice. The Correctional Centers that currently exist in Ghana were established in 1947 – before the passing of Act 653 – to “reform, rehabilitate and reintegrate” the country's young offenders through a series of moral and vocational training. Section 39 (1) allows the Minister responsible for Social Welfare to establish and manage the Junior Correctional Centers, while Section 39 (2) of the Juvenile Act grants the establishment and management of the Senior Correctional Centers to the Ministry of Interior.

As at August 2018, the Senior Correctional Center (formerly known as the Borstal Institute), which is the only functional male juvenile reformatory unit in the country, housed 230 boys from all over the regions. The Girls Correctional Center – the only senior correctional center for girls in Ghana – has nine inmates. These correctional centers, which are required to offer skills training and appropriate education to young offenders, are consistently faced with low budget allocation, poor training facilities, outdated equipment, and other resource constraints.

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Also of major concern is the lack of the very-much-needed stationed physicians and clinical psychologists at the correction centers. These account, in part, for the difficulties associated with reintegrating the youth offenders back into society and the hardships and disillusionment the youth face which often fuel recidivism.

CDD-Ghana is very much concerned that senior correctional centers have been neglected and that the Ghana Prisons Service and the Department of Social Welfare struggle to manage these juveniles amidst the highlighted challenges. In line with the UN Convention of the Child, Article 3 (1) of the Convention indicates that “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration,” the Center wishes to remind government and major stakeholders of its obligations to respect and uphold the fundamental human rights of all citizens, including juveniles who may be in conflict with the law.

CDD-Ghana calls on the government as a matter of urgency to pay serious attention to the correctional centers that play a key role in the reformation of these young offenders. The Center recommends the following actions to strengthen and enhance senior correctional centers in the country to avert the breeding of juvenile criminals.

- i. Adequate resourcing for the Senior Correctional Centers
- ii. Build Senior Correctional Centers in all the regional capitals to prevent juveniles from being sent to adult prisons
- iii. Provide stationed physicians and clinical psychologists to the Senior Correctional Centers
- iv. Provide the necessary training materials, technical and vocational equipment to assist in skills development and training for these young offenders
- v. Set start-up capital for those who may complete their sentence to launch them into self-employment, in the bid to avoid recidivism
- vi. Develop a tracking system to check recidivism
- vii. National Commission on Civic Education to embark on public sensitization on stigmatization of young offenders by the society

CDD-Ghana believes that these young offenders may have the potential to reform, rehabilitate and reintegrate into society and contribute their quota to national development if they are given the necessary assistance they deserve.