



Oral Statement

Human Rights Council 43rd Session

General Debate under Item 9

16 June 2020

Statement read by Wissam al-Saliby

Madam President,

In Canada, while only 5% of the population is indigenous, indigenous people make up about a third of the prison population, and a third of deaths in police custody.¹

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 10-17 make up about 60 per cent of the young children in youth jails, despite being only about 5 per cent of the population.²

In the United States, black Americans represent 33% of the sentenced prison population, despite representing only 12% of the U.S. adult population. Hispanics accounted for 23% of the prison population, compared with 16% of the adult population. Also, African Americans in the United States constitute 47% of innocent defendants wrongfully convicted of crimes and later exonerated.³

In India, Adivasi and Dalit communities account for a quarter of the country's population, but constitute a third of prisoners.⁴

These sample statistics are indicative of systemic racial injustice in these countries, injustice that exists in many more countries all over the world.

We believe that no race or ethnicity is greater or more valuable than another.

We urge all countries to work against the over-representation of their racial, ethnic or indigenous minorities in prisons.

The litmus test for sustainable peace and SDG16 are the treatment of minorities.

Thank you.

1 More than one-third of people shot to death over a decade by RCMP officers were Indigenous, November 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-more-than-one-third-of-people-shot-to-death-over-a-decade-by-rcmp/>; Spotlight on Gladue: Challenges, Experiences, and Possibilities in Canada's Criminal Justice System, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/gladue/p2.html>; Indigenous People in Federal Custody Surpasses 30%, 2020, <https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20200121-eng.aspx>; Admissions to adult custody, by sex, Aboriginal identity and jurisdiction, 2017/2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00010/tbl/tbl05-eng.htm>

2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018, Youth detention population in Australia 2018, AIHW, Canberra, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2018/contents/table-of-contents>; Review on Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility, 2020, <https://vcoss.org.au/policy/review-on-raising-the-age-of-criminal-responsibility/>

3 Black imprisonment rate in the U.S. has fallen by a third since 2006, Pew Research, May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/06/black-imprisonment-rate-in-the-u-s-has-fallen-by-a-third-since-2006/>; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)'s Criminal Justice Fact Sheet <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>; Race and Wrongful Convictions in The United States, 2017, https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Documents/Race_and_Wrongful_Convictions.pdf

4 India's National Crime Records Bureau report says that Adivasi and Dalit communities account for about 24.4 per cent of the country's population, but constitute 34 per cent of prisoners. Source: <https://ummid.com/news/2018/December/20.12.2018/dalits-and-adivasis-make-up-considerable-number-of-indias-prison-population.html>