

## PRISON ADMINISTRATION IN SRI LANKA: THE PROBLEM OF CONGESTION

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The problem of overcrowding in prisons in Sri Lanka has become endemic in the system for over twenty five years. Earlier the prisons were overcrowded with convicted short term offenders serving sentences under six months because over seventy five per cent of the total number of admissions annually were persons sentenced to short terms of imprisonment. The situation has however now changed and there is no overcrowding among the convicted prisoners but the problem has become much worse because the prisons are now overcrowded with remand prisoners.

Sri Lanka has thirteen closed prisons excluding the open prison camps and the open work camps. Three of these closed prisons are in the capital city of Colombo and the other ten in the provincial towns. Four out of the thirteen prisons are used exclusively for the location of remand prisoners. In the other nine prisons both convicted and remand prisoners are detained with separate sections or wards for the remand prisoners. The authorised accommodation available in each of these remand prisons and the sections of the convicted prisons is fixed according to the basis of an authorised minimum cubic area for each prisoner. On this basis the authorised accommodation available at the present time is approximately for one thousand three hundred remand prisoners and five thousand three hundred convicted prisoners. The average daily prison population in Sri Lanka is however approximately six thousand remand prisoners and four thousand convicted prisoners. On this basis the extent of overcrowding can be better imagined than described. This does not, however, mean that six thousand persons are detained in the space meant for one thousand. It means that the prisons in Sri Lanka are compelled to find accommodation for the excess remand prisoners in the space meant for the convicted prisoners thereby creating a host of problems. It also means that both the remand prisoners as well as the convicted prisoners who are detained in the closed walled institutions do not get the entitled space authorised for each prisoner in prison. In 1983 a total of 75,608 persons were admitted to the prisons in Sri Lanka. Of this number 66,074 were remand prisoners and 9,543 were convicted prisoners. Out of the 66,074 remand prisoners 3,905 were women. A very striking feature in these figures is the totally disproportionate number of persons, both men and women, remanded when compared with the number of men and women admitted as convicted prisoners.