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HUMAN RIGHTS

# Report: Prison overcrowding, human trafficking are Costa Rica's top human rights issues

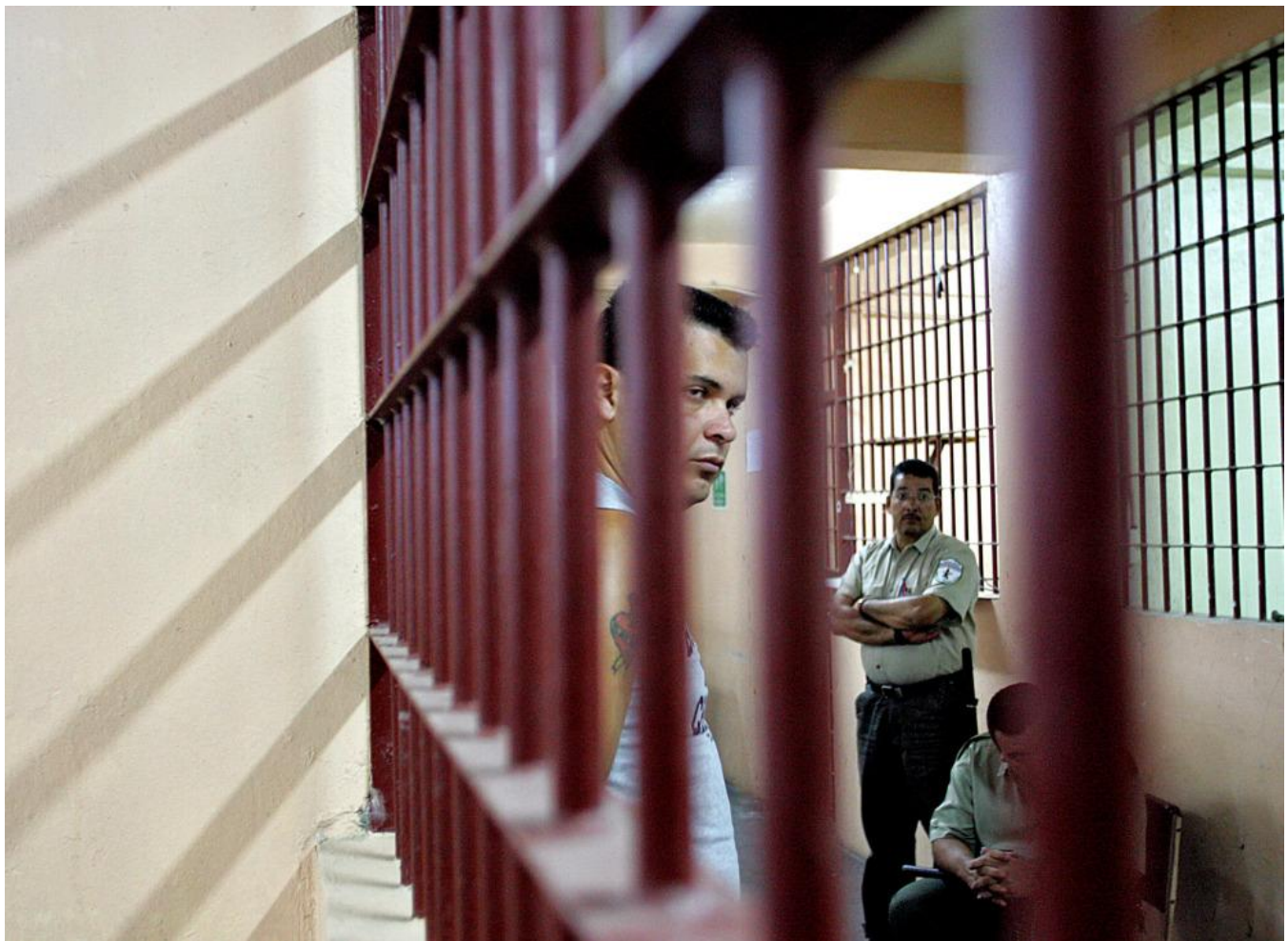
ZACH DYER | 3 DAYS AGO



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Costa Rica's San Sebastián Prison. Yuri Cortez/AFP

Harsh prison conditions, domestic abuse and [human trafficking](#) are among the top concerns for Costa Rica, according to the United States State Department's 2013 [Human Rights Practices report](#).

In the report released Friday, Costa Rica received top marks in freedom of speech, assembly and movement and access to information, as well as for its [anti-torture](#) prohibitions.

The State Department's assessment found that several prisons lacked adequate sanitation, access to medical care, and the prisons struggle to control violence among inmates. Access to drugs and substance abuse was common.

Overcrowding in Costa Rican prisons prompted one judge in San José to [release 240 inmates](#) incarcerated for aggravated robbery in October 2013.

The prison population in Costa Rica exceeded capacity by 38 percent, according to the account. The number of inmates reached 31,491 under the supervision of the Costa Rican prison system in August 2013, compared to 28,046 in July 2012. San José's San Sebastian prison held 1,159 prisoners in unsanitary conditions in a facility planned to hold just 664, the report said.

Authorities acknowledged that child sex exploitation and tourism was a serious problem in Costa Rica. The Child Welfare Office reported 19 cases of children sexually exploited for commercial purposes between January and June 2013. In 2012, the judicial branch noted only four successful prosecutions for sex with minors involving payment.

When it came to corruption, Costa Rica avoided the censure the State Department leveled against many [other Latin American countries](#), but the report noted that "officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity." The report mentioned a preliminary report from the ethics solicitor's office finding insufficient oversight of the presidency after President Laura Chinchilla [accepted a ride on a private jet](#) to Peru in May 2013. The document also cited the ongoing investigation into graft allegations from the construction of Route 1856 along the northern border with Nicaragua, among the notable cases.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called out China, Cuba, Egypt, Russia, Syria, South Sudan, and Ukraine among the countries with the most troubling human rights abuses in the preface to the report.

“... These reports show that too many governments continue to tighten their grasp on free expression, association, and assembly, using increasingly repressive laws, politically motivated prosecutions and even new technologies to deny citizens their universal human rights, in the public square, and in virtual space,” Kerry wrote in his preface to the report.



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