

Crime and Punishment in Colombia.

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Crime and Punishment in Colombia: Between Impunity and the Need for a More Productive and Just System.

Colombia has endured a deep rift between crime and punishment for decades. A society marked by violence, corruption, and institutional mistrust cannot aspire to peace if it continues to tolerate impunity as the norm and legal weakness as a strategy. In a country where criminals often enjoy more protections than victims, it is urgent to rethink our criminal justice model from a perspective that not only punishes fairly, but also demands productivity, discipline, and true accountability. Criminals, simply because they break the law and threaten the common good, do not deserve leniency, but rather consequences commensurate with the gravity of their actions.

In many developed countries, punishment is not limited to passive confinement. In systems like those in Norway, Germany, or even some US states, prisoners are forced to work, produce, build, clean, and in some cases, through hard work, return what they have stolen from society. This approach not only allows prisoners to contribute to the system rather than becoming an economic burden, but also imposes formative discipline. In contrast, in Colombia, much of the prison system has become a space for idleness, internal corruption, and continued crime. Prisons are overcrowded, but at the same time ineffective: they neither truly punish nor rehabilitate in a structured way.

Introducing a system of compulsory labor for inmates, far from being a retrograde measure, is a way to link justice, dignity, and usefulness. Criminals cannot live off the state while thousands of honest citizens barely survive. If someone destroys, steals, or kills, they must rebuild, repay, and repair with their own hands, their own time, and their own strength. This is not about torture or revenge, but about fairness. Prison cannot be seen as a comfortable parenthesis in the life of the criminal, but as a stage that forces them to confront their decisions with real effort.

Of course, this productive model must be accompanied by a genuine social reintegration program. Punishment is not enough: transformation is necessary. If an individual serves their sentence, works while in prison, and demonstrates a willingness to change, the system must offer them a real second chance, with access to education, employment, and psychological support. But that opportunity must be earned, not given. The widespread leniency that characterizes the Colombian system today is counterproductive: it reduces the authority of the law and perpetuates cycles of recidivism.

Part of the problem lies in the fragility of the Colombian legal and judicial system. The laws are lenient, processes slow, and institutional corruption is rampant. Many crimes go unsolved, others are filed or negotiated. This perception of impunity fuels the feeling that committing crimes in Colombia is worth it because the consequences are minimal. This not only demoralizes law-abiding citizens but also reinforces the breakdown of the social fabric.

Conclusion

Colombia urgently needs reform in its approach to crime and punishment. We cannot continue to reward violence with clemency or tolerate recidivism with folded arms. A more robust penal system is needed, one that imposes labor as a useful punishment, that rehabilitates rigorously, and that releases only those who have demonstrated real change. Criminals do not deserve automatic leniency; they deserve firm justice and a clear path to redemption, if they are willing to follow it. Only in this way can we aspire to a more just, safer, and less cynical society in the face of the pain that so many crimes continue to cause. ious, more just, and more awake.