

China Prison Society Delegation Conducts Study Tour to Canada And Signs and MOU with the International Centre

By Brian Tkachuk

The China Prison Society and the International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy have successfully developed an excellent working relationship for the exchange of ideas and information on theoretical research, legal frameworks, management practice and operational experience in the area of corrections in the past three years. National and local correctional services in both countries have participated and supported the activities of cooperation organized by the two Parties. The China Prison Society and the International Centre, jointly recognize that crime and criminal justice are common issues to many countries in the world and to both organizations.

On September 25 – October 3, 2000 six officials representing the China Prison Society and the provincial prison services traveled to Canada to survey and gain an understanding of Canada's corrections and conditional release system. This was the second visit by Chinese correctional officials to Canada, completed under the International Centre's "Sentencing and Corrections" component of its China/Canada Phase II *Criminal Law and Criminal Justice Cooperation Program*. The Program is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Ford Foundation. The visit reciprocates two Canadian correctional delegation visits to China in May 1998 and October 1999. The activities for the delegation's eight day visit were carried out with the generous support and participation of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the National Parole Board (NPB).

Having already gained a general understanding of Corrections in Canada through the earlier exchange visits and seminars, both in China and Canada, this particular visit focussed on specific aspects of Canadian corrections namely, case management, parole, community corrections, correctional research and prison industries (CORCAN). Various institutional and site visits in the Ontario and Pacific Regions of the CSC, as well the scientific presentations at both the CSC and NPB Headquarters in Ottawa, demonstrated the complex but systematic approach to the management of federal offenders in Canada.

Theoretical presentations were provided at each institutional and site visit highlighting aspects of offender classification and risk assessment; correctional planning and program interventions; release options, release planning and decision making; and community supervision. Although business, production and marketing aspects of CORCAN were addressed, presentations emphasized CORCAN's obligation and responsibility to provide meaningful employment and job skill development opportunities for offenders.

The delegation visited medium and minimum security institutions, community correctional and residential centres, and community parole offices and program units. They were also introduced to specialized community interventions such as the team supervision unit and the employment preparation Centre operated by CORCAN in Toronto, as well as the Relief Program at the Sumas Community Correctional Centre in Abbotsford. This range of facilities, programs and services illustrated the ongoing process involved in assessing and reducing the risk that offender's pose to the community, in preparation for their safe reintegration into society. At the same time it showed compassion and respect for those who will not be imminently released from custody. This exemplifies the CSC's approach to the "safe and humane custody and treatment of offenders" which is one of the basic principles supporting the cooperative program of work between China and Canada in the area of corrections.

A notable observation made by our Chinese visitors during their visit was in respect to the professionalism displayed by corrections staff in Canada. They in particular noted the knowledge and ability of staff to speak on the various issues as well as their positive attitude and involvement in the day to day activities and treatment of the offender.

In addition to the site visits, two official events were hosted by the CSC. These meetings brought together senior officials from the CSC, NPB, CIDA and the International Centre, together with our Chinese colleagues, and provided a forum for the continued discussion and sharing of information related to corrections and parole. More importantly, these events provided an opportunity to renew old, and establish new, personal and professional friendships essential to establishing the trusted working relationships that are so important to the ongoing dialogue and exchange activities within this cooperative program of work between China and Canada.

One of the most significant events of the visit was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the China Prison Society and the International Centre. This agreement outlines the basis for an ongoing program of work between the Society and the Centre in the area of corrections, to be carried out over the next five years. The International Centre, in collaboration with the China Prison Society will seek the continued support of CIDA to carry out some of the proposed activities in the MOU. These efforts will also be carried out in close cooperation and with the involvement of the Correctional Service of Canada, the National Parole Board and the China Bureau of Prisons. The signing of the MOU is a clear indication of trust and a definite indication of a desire for future collaborative work to introduce changes within the Chinese prison and parole systems.

In an effort to inform the public and local community of the work of the Centre, and of CIDA, the International Centre convened a media conference to showcase the efforts and achievements of the China-Canada Criminal Law and Criminal Justice Cooperation Program, including in particular the activities of the Corrections component of this program. The Head of the Chinese correctional delegation and Vice President of the China Prison Society, Mr. Wang Ming Di, participated in this event along with representatives of the International Centre. Mr. Wang's participation in this event illustrated both the desire for transparency by the Chinese and their willingness to consider the introduction of new methods and approaches within the Chinese correctional and parole systems.

In his statement to the media Mr. Wang noted that, despite the differences of our countries culturally, we share many similarities and underlying philosophies in corrections. One of the main objectives of both organizations is to prepare offenders for safe release into the community and to reduce recidivism. Also, the nature of corrections work presents many challenges and through communication between Canadian and Chinese officials we can learn from each other. Mr. Wang alluded to Canada's experience and scientific approach to the management and treatment of offenders and stated that there were many aspects of this approach that he would like to see introduced in China.

Referring to past activities conducted within the program Mr. Wang stated that there is an eagerness to learn and that the seminars and presentations delivered by Canadian experts, including those from the CSC, NPB and the International Centre, were welcome

substantive contributions for the Chinese audiences. He also noted that the recently drafted *Comparative Study of Chinese and Canadian Correctional Systems* will not only be a valuable resource for learning more about our two systems, but would be the first major publication on corrections that China has ever produced with a foreign country. Referring to the recently signed MOU, Mr. Wang stressed the importance of maintaining a continued working relationship with Canadian partners in their efforts to improve the Correctional system in China.

Although we are very early in our program of exchange in the area of corrections, impacts of these exchanges are already being realized. Following, and as a result of discussions that took place during the previous Chinese delegation's visit to Canada in 1998, women are now being introduced as prison officers in an all male prison in Shanghai. Mr. Wang, has also indicated that he will be making a recommendation that China look more closely at Canada's case management and conditional release strategy as the positive results in Canada, which are scientifically researched, give merit to their consideration for implementation in China. Supported by efforts conducted through this program the Director General of the China Prison Bureau has been nominated as the Regional Vice Chair of the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA) for the Asia Region.

The past three years has also seen the development of many professional and personal friendships between Chinese and Canadian correctional officials. These friendly and trusted relationships are proven to be essential to open dialogue and will continue to be the catalyst for future exchange activities amongst the various organizations involved. These exchanges further promote the principles for the safe and humane custody and treatment of offenders and the universal protection of human rights which has and will continue to be the basis for the collaborative program of work between the various correctional agencies in our two countries.

In conclusion the International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy wishes to thank the Canadian International Development Agency, the Correctional Service of Canada the National Parole Board and the many individuals for their continued participation and support of the program. We can be proud of our collective achievements.