

The prison system: A problem for Uruguay's next government

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By María Josefina Arce

The next Uruguayan government that emerges from the general elections on the 27th will inherit a serious problem: the crisis in the prison system, ranging from overcrowding to the failure to rehabilitate inmates.

The situation has been further highlighted by the recent deaths of 6 inmates in the Santiago Vazquez prison in the capital, Montevideo. The inmates died in a fire in the only cell that was locked.

The South American nation currently has more than 15,000 prisoners, making it one of the 10 largest prison populations in the world and the first in South America.

Uruguay is no exception to the critical situation in the region's prisons, which experts say have become schools of crime.

A large part of society considers the actions of the government led by Luis Lacalle Pou to be inadequate. In fact, in 2020, the first year of his mandate, the number of people deprived of their liberty increased by 10.3%, a figure never before seen in Uruguayan territory.

The 2023 report of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Uruguayan Penitentiary System points out that most of the country's prisons are seriously overcrowded, resulting in violence and lack of control.

The document also highlights the very poor food and health services provided in these centers, where there is also very limited space for educational activities.

The situation was denounced by the Organization of Civilian Prison Officials, which described the conditions in prisons as unacceptable and deplorable and called for the adoption of measures to guarantee decent conditions for workers and people deprived of their liberty.

Experts describe the situation in the country's prisons as borderline and explosive, with the prison system continuing to grow in relation to the population, a serious problem that the next government, which will take office in March 2025, will have to face.

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