



For Immediate Release

May 9, 2023

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**NEW REPORT REVEALS MORE THAN 32,000 CHILDREN PROSECUTED AS ADULTS
WILL REMAIN INCARCERATED FOR DECADES IN U.S. PRISONS**

Findings suggestive of crimes against humanity, group calls for UN investigation

Washington, D.C. – Today, Human Rights for Kids released a [report](#) that reveals, for the first time, the full scope of the harm of prosecuting and incarcerating children as adults in the United States: over 32,000 people in prison today have been there since childhood, comprising nearly 3% of the entire national prison population.

Many children sentenced as adults will spend more than two decades in prison. Nearly 30% of children convicted as adults receive life or de facto life sentences. Absent intervention for early release, these children will either die in prison or will not come home until they are near retirement age. Children of color are far more likely to be tried as adults and often receive lengthier sentences than white children. More than 50% of the children who receive life sentences are Black, and 80% of the people currently imprisoned since childhood are racial minorities.

[Crimes Against Humanity: The Mass Incarceration of Children in the US](#) challenges the notion that there are two distinct justice systems for adults and juveniles. While the incarceration rates for children in the juvenile justice system has declined over the past 20 years, it fails to account for children who are tried as adults, ignoring the full scope of the mass incarceration of kids.

“The United States is shockingly comfortable with discarding the human rights – and lives – of children,” said **James L. Dold, J.D., CEO & Founder of Human Rights for Kids**. “Instead of offering children in crisis the healing they desperately need, the United States inflicts further suffering by cycling kids into adult prisons where they face continued abuse and harm. Prosecuting children as adults is inhumane, ineffective, and an international embarrassment. Our country cannot call itself a human rights leader while simultaneously committing one of the largest government-sanctioned human rights abuses against children in the world today.”

The number of people incarcerated in U.S. prisons for crimes committed as children is greater than the entire prison population in nearly 80% of the countries in the world. The entire prison populations of Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Scotland combined are smaller than the U.S. prison population of children prosecuted as adults.

“We now have 50 years of information, data, and science about the impact of the modern criminal justice system in American lives, and one of the things we know for certain is that the arrest, detention, and incarceration of youth - especially long sentences - does far more harm than good,” said **Ana Zamora, founder & CEO of The Just Trust**. “This is no longer an issue with two sides. If we really care about fostering true accountability, rehabilitation, and community safety, we have to change the way we treat children. We’re so proud to support Human Rights for Kids’ work to do this.”

In adult prisons, children are subjected to unimaginable trauma, including rape, violence, and solitary confinement. Several of these children were also originally given death sentences or sentenced to life or de facto life without parole, all of which constitute torture for children. The United States’ treatment of children as adults in the criminal justice system is not only a violation of international law but may also constitute a crime against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

“For the first time, we have a clear picture of the extent of the current incarceration of people who were originally charged and sentenced as youths,” said **Jenna Bottler, CEO of Justice Action Network**. “This data is instrumental in analyzing the impacts this process has on the overall criminal justice system, and understanding how and when policymakers need to act to ensure a more effective system of justice. We commend the experts at Human Rights for Kids for their tireless work in developing this groundbreaking and comprehensive data.”

The report provides an in-depth analysis of how the incarceration of children has proliferated over the last 50 years, tracing back to the superpredator theory popularized in the 1990s that dehumanized children of color and led to a wave of overcriminalization of Black and brown kids that still continues today. The report also offers bold proposals for state and federal policymakers on how to prevent children from entering the system and how to provide retroactive relief to those who are still incarcerated.

The full report can be found [here](#).

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ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS FOR KIDS

Human Rights for Kids is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of the human rights of children. We use an integrated, multi-faceted approach which consists of research & public education, coalition building & grassroots mobilization, and policy advocacy & strategic litigation to advance critical human rights on behalf of children in the United States and around the world. We work to protect children from harm; reform justice systems to ensure

society focuses on rehabilitating children who come into conflict with the law; protect immigrant, non-native children from harm and discrimination; promote access to quality education for all children; and promote healthy communities for children to ensure access to housing and health care.