

Transcript: “A Message from IG Horowitz: Status Report on the DOJ’s International Prisoner Transfer Program” – August 2015

Hello. My name is Michael Horowitz, and I am the Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Today our office released a follow-up report on our 2011 review of the Department’s international prisoner treaty transfer program. That’s the program that allows the Department to transfer certain foreign inmates in federal custody to prisons in their home nations.

Nearly 43,000 federal inmates are from eligible treaty nations – representing one-fifth of the entire federal prison population. Our report found that the number of foreign inmates requesting transfers increased from about 14,000 to more than 24,000 inmates between fiscal years 2010 and 2013.

However, during the same period, there was actually a slight decrease in the average number of foreign inmates who were transferred to their home countries. Of the 24,000 who sought transfers, an average of only about 227 per year, were sent home to serve the rest of their prison sentences.

That was even less than we found during our review four years ago.

As a result, we remain concerned that the Department is not fully utilizing the transfer authority Congress gave it.

Our review also found that many factors remain outside of the Department’s control. Chief among these is the failure by other countries to agree to transfers.

Still, we suggested that more foreign inmates could be transferred and sent home to serve the rest of their prison sentences if the program:

- One, had more resources,
- Two, had more Department support,
- And three, considered new strategies for working with the State Department and other nations to expand the program.

That’s important because if the Department could transfer more inmates to serve the remainder of their sentences in their home countries, it would not only help reduce federal prison overcrowding but also save tax dollars.

To learn more about our findings and our five recommendations to improve the treaty transfer program, please check out our full report. You can find it at our website, at oig.justice.gov.

Online you can also find a podcast in which we discuss today’s findings in greater detail.

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Thank you for your interest in the OIG's work and for joining me today.