



**Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) – Researched and compiled by the  
Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 27 January 2011**

**Information on Maison d'Arret in Brazzaville. Reports of torture in  
prisons in Congo.**

An *IRIN News* report on prison conditions in the Republic of Congo states:

“Inside the crumbling, mildewed walls of Brazzaville's prison in the capital of the Republic of Congo (ROC), up to 12 men share cells designed to hold four inmates. The cells have neither running water, nor toilets, and the few belongings convicts have are hung on nails or strewn across the filthy floor. ‘There are serious problems with this facility,’ Clive Obambi, a repeat offender who is serving time for theft, said. ‘The daily food ration is meagre, and we live in conditions that are hard to bear.’ In addition, because of the slowness in processing case files, a prisoner can spend up to eight months in custody before arraignment. The situation is much the same in the six other prisons and numerous police jails throughout the country. According to government authorities, the country's prison population, although variable, is around 900, with nearly 400 confined in Brazzaville.” (IRIN News (17 May 2006) *Congo: Decay, disease, violence stalk convicts*)

The *United States Department of State* country report on the Republic of Congo, in a section titled “Prison and Detention Center Conditions”, refers to the Maison d'Arret prison in Brazzaville as follows:

“Prison and detention center conditions were harsh and life threatening. Prisons were overcrowded. More than 500 prisoners were housed in the Brazzaville Maison d'Arret, known as the central prison, which was built in 1944 for fewer than 100 prisoners. In the central prison, the only prison in the capital, most cellmates slept on the floor on cardboard or thin mattresses in small cells, exposing them to disease. Food was poor and health care virtually nonexistent, provided primarily, if at all, by outside charities. Prisoners and detainees in the central prison usually received one meal per day.” (United States Department of State (3 March 2010) *2009 Human Rights Report: Republic of the Congo*)

This section of the report also states:

“There were six prisons in the country but only two were in operation: the one in Brazzaville and one in Pointe Noire. Other facilities stopped functioning in 2008 due to dire conditions, and many prisoners were allowed to leave. By year's end the prison population was an estimated 492, the majority of whom were awaiting trial; most were jailed for assault and robbery. The Brazzaville prison held 347 prisoners, including 37 women and 45 minors. The Pointe Noire prison held 165 prisoners, including three women and two minors.” (ibid)

In a section titled “Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment” the same report continues stating:

“The constitution and law prohibit such practices and, unlike the previous year, there were no confirmed reports that government officials employed them.” (ibid)

The annual report on the Republic of Congo published by *Freedom House*, in a section titled “Political Rights and Civil Liberties”, notes:

“Congo's weak judiciary is subject to corruption and political influence. Members of the poorly coordinated security forces act with impunity, and there have been reports of suspects dying during apprehension or in custody. Prison conditions are life threatening. Women and men, as well as juveniles and adults, are incarcerated together, and rape is common.” (Freedom House (3 May 2010) *Freedom in the World 2010 - Congo, Republic of (Brazzaville)*)

The annual report from *Amnesty International*, in a paragraph headed “Prison conditions”, states:

“One detainee was shot dead by a guard in January when more than 100 prisoners staged a mass escape from Brazzaville central prison. Local human rights organizations stated that overcrowding and government failure to feed prisoners were reasons behind the escape.” (Amnesty International (28 May 2008) *Report 2008 - Republic of Congo*)

An *IRIN News* report on conditions in the Maison d'Arret prison notes:

“Oben said that in addition to making the trial process more efficient, the prison needed a bigger budget to properly feed its detainees. They currently receive only one meal a day, usually bread and fish. A prisoner, who did not want to be named, said most cellmates slept on the floor, on cardboard or thin mattresses in their small cells, leaving them exposed to diseases. On 23 January 2007, almost 200 prisoners led a protest over conditions. One was killed when he climbed a wall trying to escape, and there was a riot when inmates refused to return to their cells. More than 300 prisoners are packed into the jail, built in 1944 and meant for 150 people. This prison is the only one in the capital city.” (IRIN News (31 July 2007) *Congo: Prison system criticised for ill-treatment*)

See also a *Reuters* report which states:

“Nearly 200 prisoners broke out of a crowded jail in Congo Republic's capital Brazzaville overnight and one died in the attempt, security officials said on Wednesday. ‘These bandits are now at large, and that could pose security problems. It was over a problem with food which we must resolve,’ said Justice Minister Gabriel Entcha-Ebia. Human rights organisations have frequently criticised conditions at the Maison d'Arret de Brazzaville, the country's biggest prison, where they say inmates frequently go hungry.” (Reuters (24 January 2007) *Nearly 200 Congo inmates break out of crowded jail*)

An *Agence France Presse* report states:

“Conditions in the Republic of Congo's prisons are ‘as dreadful as they could be’, according to a report published Thursday by a coalition of rights groups. The Congolese Federation for Human Rights (Fecodho) said prisoners were held in appalling conditions in cramped jails across the central African nation. Brazzaville's prison, built to hold 100, is currently home to up to 600 inmates, the federation said, and no new jails have been built in Congo since independence in 1960. ‘Conditions observed in prisons across the country are as dreadful they could be,’ Fecodho said in a report following a seven-month investigation. ‘Not only do prisoners live in extremely cramped conditions, packed in like livestock, but none of the basic United Nations standards are observed,’ the report said.” (Agence France Presse (10 December 2009) *Rights report slams Congo prison conditions*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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