

Foreword

This guide has been produced in response to requests for information from the families and friends of Canadian citizens detained or imprisoned abroad. Its objective is to make information available about the services that the Government of Canada, through the Department of External Affairs and its missions abroad (whether embassies, high commissions or consulates) can and cannot provide. A careful reading of its contents will give useful guidance and should be helpful in shaping realistic expectations. It must be understood at the outset that the department is under no legal obligation to provide services to Canadians incarcerated overseas, but does so for humanitarian and compassionate reasons. It accordingly retains in each case the right to determine the range and frequency of services and the option to withdraw them, in part or completely.

Protection, Advice and Assistance

The practical and emotional problems arising from arrest and detention in a distant country with poor or non-existent telephone and postal services, and a different culture or language, can be daunting. In such circumstances the Department of External Affairs can help by providing advice and assistance. Travelling Canadians must nevertheless recognize that the department cannot shield them from the consequences of their actions abroad. If a Canadian breaks the law of another country, he or she is subject to judicial process according to the laws of that country. A person's status as a foreigner or one's ignorance of local laws is no more an excuse in other countries than it would be in Canada.

If you learn that a friend or family member has been arrested abroad, you should contact the department's Consular Operations Division in Ottawa (telephone: (613) 996-4376). It will provide you with general background concerning the country involved, the conditions of imprisonment there, and means of contacting the prisoner. It will also try to answer your specific questions or to obtain information if it is not