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news release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Prison Ministry Leaders From More than 100 Countries Gather in Toronto This Week:

World Convocation Attendees Discuss Prison Reformation June 28 to July 2

TORONTO, June 27, 2011 – Representatives from more than 100 member countries, who work with prisoners around the world who have been forgotten or shunned by most of society, will meet in Toronto June 28 through July 2 at Prison Fellowship International's World Convocation.

[Prison Fellowship International](#) (PFI), the world's largest prison ministry with 119 member countries, works to improve the moral, social, physical and spiritual well-being of prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families and victims of crime.

"The task of prison ministry is daunting," said Ron Nikkel, PFI's president and CEO. "World Convocation provides a place where those of us working in prison ministries can come together and motivate each other. It is focused on how we can work more effectively, but also on the stories we have to tell."

Former prisoners, chaplains, volunteers, politicians and prison officials from more than 130 countries are expected to attend the [World Convocation](#), which is held every four years.

Speakers at this year's convocation include Pierre Allard, prison chaplain and former president of the International Prison Chaplains' Association; John Rucyahana, retired Anglican bishop and president of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda; Theary C. Seng, human rights activist, lawyer and founder of the Cambodian Centre for Justice and Reconciliation; and Philip Yancey, author, journalist, and Editor at Large for Christianity Today magazine.

One of the key emphases of the event will be restorative justice, which seeks to repair the harm done by crime. PFI emphasizes repentance and forgiveness with prisoners and their victims. In Rwanda, victims and perpetrators are brought together to live in "reconciliation villages."

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The convocation also will display dozens of paintings, sketches and sculpture in an international prisoners' artwork exhibition and competition.

"There is a lot of hidden creativity in these prisons that doesn't get a chance to get out," Nikkel said. "The art competition encourages creative expression and gives a voice to the prisoners who can't come to a conference like this."

As prison populations around the world have grown rapidly, extreme overcrowding, poor ventilation, food shortages, substandard sanitation and outbreaks of violence have been problems. For instance, in Ecuador, prisoners have waited eight years before meeting with a judge; and in Zimbabwe, bodies were stacked in the hallways due to overcrowding in the morgue.

PFI volunteers, more than 50,000 in all, in each member country visit places like these, where other people fear to go, to work with prisoners.

"Most people involved in prison work find themselves on the margins of ministry," Nikkel said. "They often lack the support systems – whether spiritual or material – that we take for granted in North America and Europe."

The most extensive international criminal justice ministry, Prison Fellowship International is active in every region of the world. More information is available at <http://www.pfi.org>.

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Note to Editors: Media are invited to attend the PFI Convocation. A news conference will be held June 28 at 4 p.m. ET. For more information, to acquire on-site media credentials or to arrange an interview with PFI representatives, please visit <http://www.alrcnewskitchen.com/pfi> or contact Steve Yount at 972.267.1111 or steve@alarrayross.com.