

PRISON
A LA
CARTE



SAN DIEGO PRISON OPEN ITS DOORS

The San Diego Women's Prison is located in the historic heart of Cartagena, a tourist town in northern Colombia. In this overcrowded prison where violence reigns, the Interno restaurant opened to the public in December 2016. The San Diego Women's Prison is a pioneer in reintegration and improvement of detention conditions. In addition to the unique experience of eating in prison gourmet dishes served by inmates, it primarily allows the prisoners of San Diego to benefit from "segundas oportunidades" (second chances), as displayed on the restaurant's facade.

The restaurant was created by the Accion Interna Foundation currently headed by Johana Bahamon. This famous Colombian actress wanted to offer new opportunities for inmates. They received workshops by local starred chefs to learn them cooking and service skills in order to give them back some self-esteem : "Everything has changed since Interno, before we were not doing anything, and now we can do something of our hands and prove to the rest of the society that we are capable of it. We feel useful.", they say. For these inmates deprived of freedom, often bereft of confidence, cooking and serving meals encourages the rehabilitation process. When entering this warmly decorated restaurant, visitors and inmates alike end up forgetting they are inside a prison.

Thirty women work in the restaurant, which allows them to reduce their prison sentence while receiving a salary. The rest of the profits from the restaurant serve to improve the quality of life of the 180 inmates.



The outdoor courtyard of the San Diego Women's Prison is located in the heart of the historic city of Cartagena, in northern Colombia.



Arleth Martinez, 26, is sentenced to six years in prison for extortion. She is waiting for the meals to be ready in the kitchen. She works as a waitress for Interno, a restaurant which opened in December 2016 inside San Diego's prison.



Since the existence of the restaurant Interno in the San Diego prison, profits have helped to improve the quality of life of the 180 prisoners. Before, they had to sleep on wet floors with 30 people per cell. Now, everyone is allowed a bed and mattress.



Cindy Ayala, 28, is the mother of two little girls. She has not seen them for almost a year. The ride to prison is very expensive for Cindy's mother, who has to take care of her daughter's children since her imprisonment. Cindy was given a 17-year prison sentence for killing her abusive husband. "I committed a homicide before he committed a femicide," she says, explaining the reasons for her act.



Among the 180 women currently detained, about 30 of them directly wanted to participate in the restaurant project launched by the Acción Interna Foundation. Others who did not want to take part in the project, still received training in various sectors such as computer, bakery, gardening, and entrepreneurship.



Cindy thinks about her first two years in prison. She explains that before working as a waitress, she was using drugs because there was nothing else to do inside the prison. Thanks to the action of the foundation, she managed to overcome her addiction : "Everything is in the mind, I feel more responsible now," says the young woman. She sends all the money she earns at the restaurant to pay for school, medicine and clothing for her daughters.



A customer enters the restaurant Interno. On the wall of the entrance is written "segundas oportunidades" which means "second chances". Although the concept of eating gourmet dishes in prison is innovative, most of the guests come to Interno for the purpose of tasting this social rehabilitation experience for inmates.



Arleth welcomes new customers. On her uniform, it is written: "I believe in second chances". Interno is the first restaurant in the world opened in a women's prison in Latin America with the aim of improving the living conditions in the penitentiary sector. It is a unique model of reintegration that emphasizes reconciliation between prisoners and civilians.



This room in the very heart of the San Diego jail has been completely renovated, and warmly decorated by the inmates so that they can enjoy a friendly workplace to welcome guests.



Paula Aguirre (left) and Cindy prepare the room for lunch service. Conscientious in their work, they see this opportunity to learn some knowledge everyday but also to improve relations between inmates. This builds up cohesion amongst the inmates.



The purpose of Acción Interna Foundation is to fight against the vulnerability of women prisoners by developing their abilities. For Cindy, this young mother full of energy, working in the prison offers her new prospects for the future. It helps her to keep hope for herself and her daughters.



Cielo (left), the eldest of the cooking team, is concentrating on preparing starters. When she does not cook, she spends her time making her friends laugh. Yesica (right), likes being responsible for desserts: "It allows me to forget about my problems during the day. In the evening I'm tired and I can finally sleep well".



Yesenia Cervantes also loves the atmosphere in the kitchen. She is in charge of cooking food. The women in the kitchen are also allowed to use sharp knives to prepare delicious dishes.



"I love my job", says Luz Adriana Díaz, coordinator of the restaurant, who has complete confidence in the inmates. "For me, they are women like us, above all, it is important to recognize them as people with rights", says the coordinator.



Yesenia is afraid the Carimañolas (Yuca croquettes stuffed with meat, a typical Caribbean recipe) will cool down. Therefore, she hurries up to bring them as soon as possible to the waitress in the restaurant.



Seafood risotto prepared by Celio. All the women in the kitchen were trained by local starred chefs.



Isabel Bolaños (right) is the official secretary of Luz (left) for whom she is making a little skirt. Luz is very appreciated by the female prisoners. She believes in these women and she does not care what the prisoners have done before because "what is important is the present and what they can do together."



When Isabel is not busy balancing the cash register and answering the phone to make reservations, she appreciates her husband's daily visit to the restaurant. He shows her pictures of her grandchildren. Isabel does not know how long she'll still have to stay in jail. She has been waiting for several months for her judgment. She is accused of killing a paramilitary officer, a charge she denies and labels as a false accusation of a fighter of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Such means are being used to obtain reduced sentences during the paramilitary trials, in the context of its demobilization.



Libis Alvarez, 29, is in prison for extortion (the equivalent of 50 euros). She wanted to help a friend and found herself involved in money smuggling. She ended up denouncing this "friend" and he is currently in prison. But she must still serve a two and a half year prison sentence. Passionate about design and jewelry creation, she is very proud of her bracelets on display in the restaurant. After prison, she dreams of opening her own business.



Very friendly with the women of the project, Luz gets along very well with her «girls», as she likes to call all the women working for Interno.



Cindy hangs the little beaded bags that the inmates make to bring more profit to the foundation. They have received training given by the famous Colombian designer Hernan Zajan to learn how to create such accessories.



While Cindy, Isabel, Paula, Yesenia and others were working in the restaurant, evangelists came to San Diego Prison for a day of training about spirituality.



Alma (left) and Yesenia (right) watch people eating their meals in the restaurant. The grid that used to be a cell door is now used to separate the kitchen from the restaurant. A purely symbolic separation since here every woman can move freely.



The kitchen has a positive atmosphere on a day-to-day basis.



The evangelists baptize some detainees in a basin filled with water.



End of a work's day for Isabel, Cindy and Libis. "Here happiness is cheap!", likes to say Isabel when she talks about life in prison. "Before the foundation, we were living in really bad conditions : dark and wet rooms full of rats, no beds, no activity, insults and violence of the guards, many conflicts between the prisoners and daily drug consumption, etc.", remembers Isabel.



Cindy and Libis posing with the security guard in charge of controlling entrance of the restaurant. Since the existence of Interno's, relations between detainees and guards have improved. And when problems break out, Luz Adriana Díaz, the coordinator, talks to the the head of the prison to find solutions.



"Liberty is not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought" this quote of Lord Acton, a British historian, appears on the wall of the main corridor of the San Diego prison.



A moment of relaxation for the prisoners in charge of the maintenance of the vegetable garden that provides fresh herbs and other condiments for the restaurant.



Sitting at the entrance of her cell, an inmate spends her afternoon making a small beaded bag which will be sold after in the Interno restaurant.



After the evening shift, the inmates return to their cells. Their action during the day proves that rehabilitation for prisoners is possible thanks to a cooperation between the public and private sectors.

BIOGRAPHIES

Marie Tihon is a freelance photojournalist and is born in 1992 in Belgium. She graduated in 2015 from the university IHECS, where she studied five years of photojournalism. She believes in the capacity of a camera to facilitate contacts between people and to testify unheard stories. Marie mainly documents the daily life of women. Through her reports, she focuses on resilience, struggles for better living conditions, migration, and human rights. Above all, her aim is to highlight change makers. She is a member of Studio Hans Lucas and is currently based in Istanbul. Her work has been published in the Courier International, Al Jazeera, Femmes ici et ailleurs, Orient XXI, 24h01, Les Jours, Die Weltwoche, 6 Mois, L'Orient-Le Jour and The Daily Star.

Emilie Dejasse was born in Belgium in 1991. Plunged into travel from the outset, she naturally engaged in the social cause, equipped with her camera to witness the realities she has discovering. At 18, she decided to enter a school of journalism, IHECS, and specialized in advocacy. The facts are transcribed into writing, emotions pass through her images. She began her professional career at UNESCO, where she currently focuses on social inclusion. At the same time, she continues her activism on the ground, in Morocco, in Vietnam or in Paris, where she is based and where she recently co-created an association that empowers homeless women through capacity building.

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