

# THE STRAITS TIMES

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Swiss seek redress for plight

ZURICH - HUNDREDS of Swiss citizens locked away in their teens even though they never committed a crime are demanding compensation for the internment they endured for adolescent misbehaviour.

For nearly a century until the practice was halted in 1981, some 25,000 youngsters in Switzerland, were jailed by local authorities for what was perceived as anti-social behaviour, according to a researcher. This ranged from rebelliousness to being drunk.

Last month, after nearly 30 years of campaigning by women victims, Swiss Justice Minister Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf delivered an official apology for the 'administrative internment' of minors, which evaded the judicial system.

But some of the victims say they need another step to secure closure. 'If I explain that I was in prison at the age of 17 for my education, no one believes me,' said Gina Rubeli, who was jailed in 1970 in central Switzerland, at the Hindelbank prison for women.

'Yet I had not committed any offence,' she added. 'You suddenly found you were with thieves, murderers and hardened criminals. We didn't know why we were there and when we would get out,' she explained.

Ms Rubeli, now 58, spent much of her youth trying to escape from the clutches of a troubled family. After running away and several attempts at suicide, local authorities interned her for a year. -- AFP

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