



## **FORGOTTEN BEHIND BARS – WE MUST NOT FAIL THEM**

**PRISON FELLOWSHIP MALAYSIA**

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KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

PRISON FELLOWSHIP MALAYSIA welcomes the move to issue compound notices to MCO offenders which will alleviate the already increased work load of the police, the courts and judicial system. We appeal to the authorities for all cases especially those who have been jailed to be reviewed retrospectively; last reported 378 people had been sent to prison due to this offence (as of 1<sup>st</sup> April), probable carriers of the virus the prisons can do without.

PRISON FELLOWSHIP MALAYSIA shares with several NGO who have expressed grave concern about the situation of our prisons. The 42 prisons were reported to have a capacity of 52,000 but are currently holding 73,000 and growing. This overcrowding situation is untenable and violates one of the pillars of MCO, social distancing.

Many proposals have been advanced to solve this overcrowding issue and it was rightly decided in 2019 that we should not build more prisons but to reduce the numbers to within the capacity. It was reported that 55% of the offenders were drug related and committee was set up to establish protocol to decriminalize drugs. It was also reported that about 30% of the prison inmates are un-convicted or pre-trial remand prisoners. We are aware that prison reforms have been plagued by conflicting provisions in the different statutory Acts, Child Protection, Drugs, Prisons and MCO will add another dimension to this. Protocols to ensure justice and human dignity such as the process of remand cases and role of visiting justice under the Prison Acts have fallen into disrepair which keep people there much longer than they should. While these maybe continuing, unfortunately the prison population continues to grow unabated; already up 40% from when it reached its capacity in 2015.

Imagine the fear and mental anguish amongst the prisoners from the little they may have heard about this virus where social distancing is one of the most important mitigation factor. These prisoners will return to the community eventually except a few and their well being must not be neglected. Every effort must be given to ensure they receive the necessary health and hygiene provisions to protect prisoners, staff and visitors from the spread of infection.

We urged urgent action be given to reduce the prison population for the sake of not only the prisoners but for the community. The stigma of incarceration is difficult to shake off and this must not be compounded by being released from a prison with Covid 19 cases (God forbid). We must not fail them.

We salute the government and the public for the excellent cooperation and progress from the MCO initiatives even as we approach the third extension.

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