

For Immediate Release

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## **Reduce Prison Population as Covid-19 Mitigation Strategy**

Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM) welcomes the Prison Department of Malaysia's initiative to reduce congestion in prison facilities as a key step to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 among prisoners and call for further steps and actions to be developed to minimize and prevent further outbreak of Covid-19 in other facilities.

In the first outbreak in March 2020, SUARAM and other civil society organization have put out calls for the government to develop a necessary process to reduce the number of prisoners in detention facilities to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 transmission in an overcrowded prison. The recommendation put forward includes expediting parole for prisoners and alternative sentences for prisoners serving short sentences or imprisoned for non-serious offences. Such steps have been adopted by neighbouring country such as Indonesia in its effort to reduce risk factors in prison. Malaysia must also consider similar approaches in handling the Covid-19 pandemic.

Any failure in containing the spread of Covid-19 in prison will have drastic consequences as the virus is not restraint by prison cells and can easily infect staff members on duty. Failure to act would eventually cause an outbreak similar to those observed in Tawau prison and may spread Covid-19 beyond prison walls.

SUARAM reiterate our call and recommendations to the Prison Department, the Pardons Board and the Parole Board. We have the responsibilities to mitigate and prevent the continue proliferation of Covid-19, failure to act now is a violation of prisoners' right to health and undermine all public health initiatives introduced to combat the pandemic.

In Solidarity

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