

Sri Lanka: Release prisoners to reduce Covid-19 risk!

Tuesday 31 March 2020, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 31 March 2020).

Activists reiterate call for President to release eligible prisoners on COVID-19 fears.

*** Says most vulnerable such as sick, elderly persons, women with children should be given priority**

*** Suggests home leave for eligible prisoners for at least 2 months**

*** In interest of transparency, requests President to officially release to public decisions of committee appointed by him to decide on basis for releasing inmates, especially criteria used for releases**

A group of activists have written to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa reiterating their earlier request to expedite the release of eligible prisoners amidst fears that the new coronavirus would spread among inmates.

In the letter sent to the President yesterday, the activists appealed to him to consider factors such as the vulnerability of prisoners, such as those suffering terminal or serious illnesses, the elderly, and children living in prison with mothers, while selecting those for release.

“We call upon you to consider for release on bail persons who have been remanded for many years without being indicted, those whose trials have been ongoing for many years and those with pending appeals; all, as aforementioned, taking into consideration the nature and seriousness of the offence. Expediting decisions on sanctioning bail for detainees held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) by the Attorney General would also help in this regard,” the letter said.

The activists also appealed for the immediate release of some convicted prisoners, such as those imprisoned due to the inability to pay fines (reported to be more than 50% of the convicted), those with short prison sentences for relatively minor offences, and those who have completed most of their sentences, while expediting the release of those who are eligible for release under license and home leave, which would help ease overcrowding.

“Where home leave is concerned, we would like to highlight that they should be sent for at least a period of two months, because if not they would have to return to prison within a week, 10 days or two weeks, which could lead to the spread of COVID-19.”

They also urged the President to consider those in the Immigration Detention Centre in Mirihana and persons such as youth offenders, mothers who have children living with them, those with serious sicknesses, and other vulnerable groups in other detention centres.

“It is in the public interest and in the interest of transparency to officially release to the public the decisions of the committee appointed by the President, especially the criteria used for releases. This is important for tens of thousands of anxious family members of prisoners and will help avoid spread of misinformation and prevent the abuse of the process,” it said.

The letter was sent by Seneka Perera, Committee for Protecting Rights of Prisoners, Fr. Nandana Manatunga, Human Rights Office, Kandy, Ambika Satkunanathan, Thyagi Ruwanpathirana and Ruki Fernando, INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre.

It was copied among others to Judicial Services Commission Chairman and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka Jayantha Jayasuriya and Minister of Justice Nimal Siripala De Silva.

P.S.

<http://www.ft.lk/news/Activists-reiterate-call-for-President-to-release-eligible-prisoners-on-COVID-19-fears/56-698270>