

Malaysia: Suaram: Sosma detention doesn't just punish detainees, but families too

Saturday 21 October 2023, by [YUSRY Muhammad](#) (Date first published: 27 September 2023).

KUALA LUMPUR — Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram) today released a report on the socioeconomic impact of the controversial Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 in Malaysia.

It said that Sosma was not only about the punishment of the individual detained, but also left a wider impact on the social, economic, and psychological life of detainees, former prisoners, their families and the surrounding community.

Its executive director Sevan Doraisamy said most individuals detained under Sosma suffer a drastic drop in income, where the average person lost their current job and would find it difficult returning to it after release.

"This not only affects those who are on average in the B40 group, but also their families who have to bear additional financial burdens, including the cost of visiting a detention centre which reaches RM1,000 per month and legal fees which can reach tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of ringgit which will surely complicate their financial situation," he added.

Sevan said detention under Sosma also causes instability in family life and can break up families and strain relationships.

"This also affects children emotionally and affects their education. The majority of children experience stress and emotional instability as a result of detention.

"They also show symptoms such as refusal to go to school, sleep problems, and emotional distress. The effect is also involved in education where many of them often experience difficulties in learning, absenteeism from school, and anxiety due to negative perception from peers which is clearly disturbing educational and psychosocial development of children," he said.

Last month, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Ramkarpal Singh said the federal government has no intention to repeal Sosma, but plans to introduce two amendments to the law, one of them being the issue of bail.

Sevan suggested that the Sosma amendments cover mainly the legal provisions related to bail issues, 28-day remand and access to a lawyer in the first 48 hours.

At present, Section 13 of Sosma only allows for bail if the offender facing a security offence is below 18 years of age, a woman, sick or infirmed.

Introduced in 2012 as a replacement for the colonial-era Internal Security Act (ISA), the equally controversial preventive detention law retained its predecessor's clause which allows for suspects of an investigation to be detained without trial for up to 28 days at a time.

“Other recommendations include speeding up the court process, and providing support to detainees and their families.

“Provide education and skills training programmes for detainees, financial assistance, and rehabilitation support after release so that they can live and integrate with society as before,” he said.

Sevan also called for greater support for single mothers affected by Sosma because the average burden borne by detainees prior to their detention now fell on the shoulders of wives and single mothers.

“This study is expected to be a call for policy makers and other stakeholders to reassess the implications of Sosma and consider a more humane approach by guaranteeing human rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights,” he added.

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