



**An open letter to the Ministry of Justice and the President of the Supreme Court of Justice
Prison inmates deserve an enhanced treatment during the pandemic
and unnecessary custody should be minimized**

Amnesty International Thailand conducts policy campaign and raises the awareness on human rights with the Thai government, civil society organizations and general public who are interested in civil rights and political rights as well as the economic, social and cultural rights. Our activities include public discussions and lecture-based education, among other, to promote human rights principles in a long run.

Amnesty International Thailand has been observing the prosecution of protest leaders and participants in public assemblies in the past two years. According to the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), 635 individuals in 301 cases have been prosecuted from participating in political assemblies from July 2020 until April 2021. Of this number, 18 have been denied bail during the police investigation and after their indictment pending the trial of the trial court and the appeal of their sentencing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has plunged public health and livelihood into a crisis, particularly the inmates and prisoners in prisons, correctional institutes and other detention facilities throughout the country. This is due to constraint in terms of the facilities, prompt access to medical treatment, and communication with their families and their legal counsels. Just in 2020, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that at least 100 countries worldwide have made attempts to release more than 600,000 inmates and prisoners to address crowdedness in the prisons. Many of them are those suffering from health problems.

As you and your organizations have the direct mandates and charge to review requests and to take care of the inmates and prisoners in such facilities, Amnesty International Thailand commends you for your effort to implement the practice to minimize unnecessary custody at all levels and to ensure the inmates and prisoners bear the least impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, given the chronic “prison crowdedness” and the holding in custody of those exercising their freedom of political expression, at least seven political prisoners have contracted Covid-19 in custody. And according to the Correction Department’s reports, at least 200 inmates and prisoners have been infected with the virus while being incarcerated at the Bangkok Remand Prison, the Narathiwat Provincial Prison and the Chiang Mai Provincial Prison.

Amnesty International Thailand would like to call on the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the President of the Supreme Court of Justice to urgently mete out measures to ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of inmates and prisoners during the pandemic to minimize impact from the COVID-19 pandemic within the prison system and between the prison system and society at large. Sufficient supply of face masks, soaps and clean water should be provided to inmates and prisoners without charge, and they should afford Covid-19 testing urgently. The inmates and prisoners who test positive for Covid-19 should be isolated and have access to effective medical treatment. In addition, an effort should immediately be made to “minimize any unnecessary custody” at all levels commensurate to the policy of the Ministry and the President of the Supreme Court of Justice.