AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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MADAGASCAR’S NEW DIET FOR DETAINES IS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Amnesty International welcomes a decision confirmed in May 2019 by Madagascar’s government to approve a new, more nutritious diet for detainees, as opposed to their existing diet of mainly cassava (or manioc). In a meeting on 21 May 2019, the Minister of Justice informed an Amnesty International delegation that the new diet will alternate between three different menus and will be rolled out in prisons across the country.

According to Madagascar’s national law 2006-15, detained persons are entitled to a diet that is varied, well prepared and that corresponds with hygiene and dietetic standards. The law also stipulates that each prisoner should receive at least two meals a day. However, during prison visits, Amnesty International delegates observed how the health of detainees, including pre-trial detainees, was compromised due to their lack of access to adequate nutrition. In October 2018, the Prison administration estimated that around 70% of detainees were undernourished. Inadequate access to food and nutrition means detainees must rely on their families for additional food, with the poorest detainees being most at risk of food insecurity or plunging their families further into poverty.

In a report ‘Punished for being poor: unjustified, excessive and prolonged pre-trial detention in Madagascar’, Amnesty International urged the government of Madagascar to comply with international standards and improve the conditions of detention by adopting a National Action Plan, with concrete and time-bound goals. Among others, the organisation had asked the government to ensure that detainees have access to adequate food.

Amnesty International recognises the government’s commitment to introduce a new diet as a positive first step, and calls on the government to ensure that all detainees across the country have access to these varied diets in practice, and that this new diet is rolled out in every prison countrywide without any delays. In addition, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers should be provided with specific attention to ensure they receive access to a sufficient, diverse diet that meets their dietary needs and those of their babies or infants, especially during their early childhood development.

Other key recommendations made by Amnesty International include bringing the detention conditions in line with international standards, by providing hygienic conditions, adequate healthcare, and separation between minors and adults, and between pre-trial and sentenced detainees, across all prisons. Finally, Amnesty International continues to call on the government to decongest the prisons and tackle the overcrowding, by releasing all those detained unjustifiably in pre-trial detention, and increasing the use of alternatives to detention.