

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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MADAGASCAR: AUTHORITIES SHOULD REDUCE PRISON POPULATION AS MITIGATION AGAINST COVID-19

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic and the severe overcrowding in prisons, Amnesty International is urging the government of Madagascar to urgently consider measures to decongest its prisons by releasing groups of detainees – especially pre-trial detainees and those who may be an increased risk from the virus, such as older prisoners and those with underlying health conditions.

Despite having announced some measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within prisons, including disinfecting the prisons, and taking the temperature of detainees and prison staff, regularly, these measures will not suffice in protecting detainees from the pandemic given the severe overcrowding. Indeed, as revealed in our 2018 [report](#), Madagascar's jails are already critically overcrowded, with some prisons holding up to ten times their capacity. As of June 2019, the prison population had reached 28 000, nearly three times the country's prisons' capacity. Pre-trial and sentenced detainees are crammed together in big, unhygienic rooms, often without enough space to sleep properly. Such conditions of detention raise grave concerns for the health of detainees, should the COVID-19 virus reach the prison courtyards, as they will be unable to protect themselves from the virus. In addition, many detainees are already in poor health and hence at increased risk of falling sick, because of the lack of access to quality food and healthcare in detention.

The government of Madagascar must immediately consider measures to decongest the country's prisons, while ensuring that the remaining detainees have access to appropriate healthcare, can maintain contact with families and the outside world, and can live in hygienic conditions. In particular, Malagasy authorities should implement the measures recommended by the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention on Torture (SPT) on how to protect detainees from COVID-19, such as schemes of early, provisional or temporary release of low-risk offenders, pre-trial detainees, and detainees who are nearing the date of completion of their sentence. Full account must be taken of individual circumstances and the risks posed to vulnerable groups of prisoners, such as older prisoners or those with serious medical conditions, including those with a weakened immune system.

Background

On 30 March 2019, the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) issued advice to governments and independent monitoring bodies on how to protect people deprived of their liberty during the COVID-19 pandemic, which include a range of actions governments and independent monitoring bodies should take to protect people deprived of their liberty during COVID-19.