

PUBLIC STATEMENT

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ZAMBIA: PRESIDENTIAL PARDON OF INMATES A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION TO PREVENT SPREAD OF COVID-19

The release of inmates under the presidential pardon by president Edgar Lungu should be followed by measures to protect the health and lives of prisoners who remain in jail to avoid an outbreak of COVID-19, Amnesty International said today.

Zambian authorities announcedⁱ on 22 May that 2,984 inmates, comprised of 155 females and 2829 males would be released to mark Africa Day on 25 May in line with the presidential prerogative. Of these inmates, some were released on consideration of their age, while some were released on compassionate grounds. Some 2,719ⁱⁱ remandees were also expected to be granted unconditional bail.

The decision has left Zambia with a total prison population of 19,248.

While Amnesty International believes that the decision to pardon the 2,984 inmates is a step in the right direction in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Zambian prisons and protecting health, the organization is calling on the authorities to do more, including further releases of prisoners convicted on minor offences and not posing any danger to society to help decongest prisons and allow for adequate social distancing among remaining prisoners.

The organization is also calling for authorities to ensure sanitary conditions and provide prisoners with all necessary products and facilities, such as water, soap and sanitizers, to minimise the risk of prisoners contracting COVID-19.

BACKGROUND

The decision to pardon the inmates by President Edgar Lungu was made to commemorate African Freedom Day which was observed on 25 May under the 'presidential prerogative of mercy'. The day is commemorated annually across the African continent. Home Affairs Minister Stephen Kampyongo made the announcement on 22 May 2020.

ⁱ <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/05/22/president-lungu-pardons-2-984-inmates-to-commemorate-african-freedom-day/>

ⁱⁱ THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION COMMENDS PRESIDENT EDGAR LUNGU FOR PARDONING 2,984 INMATES