

## **Indonesia's appalling prison conditions**

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John—not his real name—is a prisoner taken into custody by the Kebayoran Baru Sector Police in Jakarta, Indonesia on March 12. What makes him different from other detainees is that he is HIV positive. He has been held under conditions so miserable that they amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

On March 23, his parents found out that John was suffering severely. He was sick, and had neither eaten nor drunk for a very long time. His face was pale and he couldn't stop trembling. John had been held at the police station from March 13, but due to his poor physical condition he was transferred to the Soekanto Police Hospital on March 25, after his family's bail request had been rejected. In the hospital, he was placed in an isolation room in a building reserved for sick prisoners.

The ambience at the medical facility is more like a prison than a hospital, with patients kept in rooms behind iron bars and locked with huge padlocks. Apart from the smell of drugs, the place is permeated with the unpleasant odors of blood and feces.

The hospital wards contain four or five beds, fully occupied. There is a toilet in the room behind a low wall, with no door.

John was placed in one of three isolation rooms in the building. Normally, only mentally ill detainees are put in these rooms, which are only about two square meters in size. The room contained no bed or mattress. There was no proper light or ventilation, the walls were dirty and full of graffiti and the floor was covered in puddles and dirt. There was a toilet behind a low wall, and no clean water. Sanitation was appallingly lacking.

John was found lying in this room, staring blankly and unable to talk. He had received no medical treatment since his arrival. He would be seen by a doctor only after April 13, for the absurd reason that April 9 is a general election, April 10 is Good Friday, and April 11 and 12 are the weekend.

The poor treatment John received at the hands of the police is more or less typical for prisoners in Indonesia, especially those with HIV/AIDS.

The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners state that sick detainees should be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals, where they should receive proper medical care and treatment from suitably trained personnel.

The rules require that a medical officer examine every prisoner as soon as possible and take all necessary measures to restore his or her health. The medical officer is responsible for the physical and mental health of the prisoners, and should daily see all sick prisoners and all who complain of illness.

The officer must also ensure the hygiene and cleanliness of the institution and the prisoners, the sanitation, heating, lighting and ventilation of the building, and the suitability and cleanliness of the prisoners' clothing and bedding.

Furthermore, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, in conjunction with the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, has recommended that Indonesia reform its correctional facilities and detention centers with regard to the health conditions of detainees. It stated that clinical services are an important component of programs to cope with HIV/AIDS and drug abuse.

In response to the recommendations, Indonesia issued a plan to strengthen the clinical services in prisons by 2010, in which the government promised to provide optimal services to every prisoner in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties, as well as national regulations concerning the treatment of prisoners.

With so many laws regulating the right to health for the detainee or prisoner, how could there be such a place as the hospital to which John was sent? The head of the Health and Medical Center of the National Police General, Brigadier (Pol) Bambang, in an interview in 2005 stated that insufficient funds were the main problem. Also, apparently there is no law stipulating which institution is responsible for financing prisoners' medical care. Therefore the costs have been taken from the police's health and medical budget, placing serious financial restraints on services.

John's condition is indeed grave and the care he is receiving is far from adequate. He is suffering truly inhuman treatment, incompatible with human rights principles. His sad story demonstrates the urgent need for an independent monitoring body to ensure that prisoners receive adequate care and treatment in the future.

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