



Support to the Rule of Law Aspects of COVID-19

Justice and Correction Service, OROLSI/DPO

The COVID-19 pandemic poses particular risks to prisons and other places of detention in almost every context. Prisoners, detainees and prison staff are especially vulnerable to contracting the disease. This not only raises serious human rights and humanitarian concerns but has significant security and protection implications through the very real risk of mass riots and escapes with resultant public health implications, requiring proactive preparedness and concerted and coordinated responses.

The Justice and Corrections Service (JCS) of the Office of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions, in the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, has been working to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19, disseminating practical guidance and operational tools to address immediate needs in the field, focusing on following strategic and operational priorities:

- ❖ The **early preparedness of places of detention to respond to COVID-19 through the dissemination of an Operational Toolbox** on prison health and safety through posters, pocket cards and contingency checklists, available in multiple languages, for direct use in places of detention to help prevent and mitigate the outbreak of COVID-19;
- ❖ Guidance on the **immediate measures required to decongest prisons**;
- ❖ and **guidance to help ensure access to justice through remote alternatives, during and after the outbreak** in compliance with international fair trial norms and standards, including the rights of the accused, victims, witnesses and civil parties.

While the primary focus has been on support to peacekeeping and special political mission settings on COVID-19 rule of law issues, the material has been requested and is being used in several non-mission settings. It has been circulated to Member States national prison services, by DCO and DPPA to all Resident Coordinator Offices, and by ICRC and the World Bank.

COVID-19 Operational Toolbox: Preparedness & Response in Places of Detention

Developed by JCS, jointly with UNITAR, and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the Operational Toolbox provides clear and concise guidance, information and visuals for direct operational use in prisons for prison administrators, prison staff, prisoners and even prison visitors to help prevent COVID-19 from entering prisons and to mitigate the impact in case of an outbreak.

Simple, practical and ready to use, the information is organized in a way that combines "posters", "pocket cards" and "contingency checklists." Through specialist designers, the communication posters are kept as visual as possible through illustrations. The Toolbox has been translated into French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, Somali, Serbian, Albanian, Swahili, Dari and Pashto, with others in progress.

In developing the material, JCS consulted widely with peacekeeping and special political missions, relevant UN entities, Member State Prison Services and various NGOs specializing in prison health in low resourced and over-crowded environments.

The package comes in two forms: email package which is lower resolution and can be distributed widely and a high-resolution version, that can be used for printing and can be accessed via the below link: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/building-rule-of-law-and-security-institutions>

Decongesting Prisons and other Places of Detention

While a number of reports, statements, and press releases have highlighted the importance of decongesting prisons early on to prevent the spread of COVID 19, this JCS guidance, through the collation and synthesis of measures being considered and implemented in various settings around the world, provides practical guidance through specific examples to help inform further recommendations and advice on prison decongestion.

Remote Court Hearings and Judicial Processes in Response to COVID-19

This paper provides guidance on the introduction of remote technology in the context of the current pandemic. Recognizing the particular challenges of introducing such measures in mission settings, the paper summarizes the elements that national authorities may need to consider in relation to the conduct of remote judicial processes. It draws upon examples of measures being undertaken in different countries, focusing on what may be possible low resource/ limited capacity contexts.

JCS Sharepoint platform

To make these and other resources readily accessible, JCS has established a dedicated platform on Sharepoint on the Rule of Law Responses to COVID-19 (<https://unitednations.sharepoint.com/sites/COVID-19ResponseinPrison>). This serves as a repository of relevant available information that not only includes relevant guidance and tools developed by JCS and other key actors, but also country specific presidential decrees, national executive orders, judicial orders or decisions plus matrices that collate information received from the field components, on prison health safety and decongestion measures, suspension of hearings, use of remote technology for hearings. This SharePoint is open to all Secretariat staff, as well as other UN system rule of law partners.

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