

Youths held without trial in Simpang Renggam
Malaysiakini.com
Feb 27, 2007
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A police watchdog has voiced concern over the large number of youths being detained without trial in the Simpang Renggam detention centre in Johor.

In announcing a new campaign to abolish all forms of detention without trial, Police Watch and Human Rights Committee estimated that 20 percent of those detained in Simpang Renggam were aged 21 and below.

"You do not punish youthful offenders [...] they must be corrected (if proven guilty by the courts)," the committee's legal advisor P Uthayakumar told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

Also present were family members of 12 former and present detainees aged 21 and below.

"The families would be happy if the police charge the detainees so that they can fight the matter in court and have their detention subject to judicial scrutiny.

"But in this case, their detention have been arbitrary," said Uthayakumar.

The lawyer claimed that the Emergency Ordinance (EO) was a 'shortcut' to apprehend suspects when there is insufficient evidence to charge them.

He said that such measures can contribute to the closing of police files on criminal cases causing the real perpetrators of the crimes to roam free, while suspects with unproven charges remain behind bars.

Corrective sentences

Preventive detention laws
• Gaming Act 1972
• Internal Security Act 1960
• Drug Dependents Act 1983
• Dangerous Drugs Act 1952
• Emergency Ordinance 1970
• Prevention of Crime Ordinance 1957
• Restrictive Residence Enactment 1933
• Firearms Increased Penalties Act 1971

Azlan Zamhari / Malaysiakini

During a recent fact finding mission to Simpang Renggam, committee secretary S Manikavasagam found that 1,200 of the 4,195 detainees were held under the EO.

A notice board at the centre revealed that 700 or 60 percent of the EO detainees

were Indian Malaysians.

Manikavasagam, who was also present at the press conference, said the common complaints from detainees include complete lack of activities, irregular meal hours, poor hygiene and lack of healthcare.

However, he claimed that prior to an unprecedented visit by Works Minister S Samy Vellu early this month, warders gave the place a massive facelift.

"Suddenly the inmates were given a TV room, carom board, a new paint job in their cells, their rusty meal bowls replaced and were even made to do morning exercise," he said.

Meanwhile, Uthayakumar said the global trend was towards 'corrective sentences' rather than prison and the lack of vocational training for inmates was against the norm.

"When someone makes a mistake, society's obligation is to correct them. This is all the more reason for the government to bend over backwards to correct the offender's behavior," he said.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/63806>