

**Press statement: Response to “Homeless Beg To Be Freed from Sungai Buloh Centre”  
18 July 2014**

WE, a coalition formed in response to issues of homelessness, wish to raise several concerns addressed in the article “Homeless Beg To Be Freed from Sungai Buloh Centre” (The Malay Mail, 17/07/2014).

The article highlights pleas for release expressed by detainees at Pusat Sehenti Bina Diri Sungai Buloh. These men and women are being held under the Destitute Persons Act 1977. The detainees in the centre include senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and persons with jobs—who have been forcibly removed from the city after sleeping, begging, or otherwise appearing as “destitute”.

We are concerned for the mental and the emotional health of detainees, who have been needlessly barred from contacting family and from returning home for Hari Raya celebration.

Prior to being arrested, detainees had access to work, telephones and communal support. Their detention now cruelly deprives them of personal liberty, independence, and essential social support from peers in the homeless community.

People experiencing homelessness face numerous structural barriers to exiting poverty and homelessness. For one, employers refuse to employ those who have lost their ICs and the penalty for replacement—of up to RM330—makes it impossible for them to obtain replacement copies.

The Social Welfare Department (JKM) has refused to allow homeless persons to register for aid they qualify for, citing the lack of IC and a residential address. Many are in dire need of assistance, yet cannot benefit from public aid. For many, even BR1M was out of reach.

We demand that the government conduct a thorough investigation into the roots of homelessness. This must be done in consultation with homeless communities, in a manner that shows respect for their position as central stakeholders in any policy, bringing their experience, knowledge, and voices to the fore.

We wish to stress that addressing homelessness requires government agencies to collectively tackle homelessness by improving related policies and programs. Addressing homelessness is under the purview of various ministries as relates to housing, labour, education, and rural and regional development - it not the work of the Social Welfare Department alone.

We demand that planned or ongoing operations by the JKM, AADK, and Police officers to arrest people who are homeless be ceased immediately. Persecuting the homeless is not the solution. People who are homeless will still return to the streets—their only place to find work and peer support. Government must address homelessness and poverty in a more humane and constructive manner, via in-community consultation.

We acknowledge that it takes time to build a relationship with any community. However, as stakeholders, the homeless community itself is the best source for understanding how we, as a society, may reduce and prevent the spread of homelessness.

**Endorsed by:**

- Brickfields Stakeholders Association
- CFC
- Dapur Jalanan
- Dignity International
- Food Not Bombs Kuala Lumpur
- KL Urban Fellowship
- Institut Rakyat
- Lawyers for Liberty
- Malaysian Indian Education Transformation Association (MIETA)
- The Nasi Lemak Project
- Need to Feed the Need (NFN)
- Pax Romana ICMICA
- Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)
- Reach Out Malaysia
- Region of Love
- SALT Movement
- Society of the Blind in Malaysia
- Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
- UBUNTU Malaysia