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Public Health Policies must be Inclusive and Durable

The Malaysian Health Coalition (MHC), Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) and Tenaganita alongside nine other non-governmental organisations urge that all public health policies must be inclusive and non-discriminatory to every resident in Malaysia.

The health and wellbeing of all residents in Malaysia, including non-citizens, are vital to everyone's health. We support the government's decision to provide medical treatment and healthcare to the Covid-19 positive cases which have emerged in immigration detention centres. However, this must come together with other measures in parallel. We urge the following:

1. Improve Living Conditions for Migrant Workers

The government must convene the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC) and enforce the Workers' Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Act 1990 (amended 2019) without undue delay. Immediate mitigation measures must be put in place to ensure that the virus does not spread. Meanwhile, details of the Act and its implementation guidelines should be disseminated publicly so ordinary citizens can play a role in monitoring the implementation of the Act. Companies that repeatedly violate the Act should not be permitted to employ migrant workers.

2. Develop a Coherent and Comprehensive Workforce Policy

In the long-term, the government must develop a coherent and comprehensive workforce policy that accounts for our true needs for migrant workers. This policy must protect the health and safety of all migrant workers in Malaysia, including appropriate and adequate financing for their healthcare. A comprehensive long-term policy will also reduce the trust deficit among non-citizen residents who may be hesitant to seek required medical attention or healthcare for fear of deportation. That said, policies against illegal migration must remain in place, and migration must be controlled.

3. Improve Conditions in Detention Centres

Immigration detention centres are crowded and confined areas where close conversations are unavoidable, the three C's which the Ministry of Health has advised against. These conditions must be improved to allow for necessary physical distancing measures which will help prevent further Covid-19 outbreaks in detention centres. Moreover, the needs of women and children detainees especially must be looked after.

We need an all-of-society effort to keep the spread of Covid-19 in the country under control. This includes cooperation from all citizens and non-citizen residents of Malaysia. With more than four months of experience fighting Covid-19 and with an indefinite journey ahead, it is time for inclusive and durable solutions, not reactive and discriminatory ones.

BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA

Signatories:

1. Beyond Borders Malaysia
2. CSO-SDG Alliance
3. Foreign Spouses Support Group
4. HungerHurts Malaysia
5. International Domestic Workers Federation
6. Malaysian Health Coalition (MHC)
7. Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC)
8. North South Initiative (NSI)
9. Our Journey
10. Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat (KOMAS)
11. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
12. Tenaganita