

Panel Presentation on *Multi-faceted Approach to Ensure Continuous Support for Reducing Reoffending: From Asian Perspective*

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**At UNAFEI and TIJ side-event on
“Reducing Reoffending: Latest Issues and Effort”**

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Mr. Keisuke Senta, Director of UNAFEI

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and pleasure for me to join all of you here at this side event on “*Reducing Reoffending: Latest Issues and Efforts*”. First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the UNAFEI, one of the Thailand Institute of Justice’s most esteemed partners, for the invitation to co-organise this event and for me to participate in the discussion. UNAFEI and TIJ have been working towards a common goal of promoting fair and effective criminal justice system particularly in Southeast Asia.

Indeed, today’s event is stemmed out of one of our mutual concerns and an enduring problem of criminal justice system; that is, **recidivism**. This topic also resonates with Workshop Topic of the 14th Crime Congress on reducing reoffending.

As we know, criminal recidivism is an important indicator of effective criminal justice institutions, and the low rate of reoffending in most cases can be attributed to successful rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. In Southeast Asia, which is no different from other parts of the world, the criteria under which the data on reoffending are collected vary widely between countries, making it

a challenge to have comparable data on recidivism. For Thailand, the reoffending rates among prisoners are 17% within one year of release and 25% within the second year.

Studies in various countries indicate that factors influencing reoffending include **substance abuse problem, unsupportive family, mental and physical illness, skill deficits as well as persisting social and economic marginalisation.** For certain groups of offenders such as women, people with HIV, or those with physical or mental disability, the process of re-entry to society can be even more complicated due to **gender stereotypes and doubled stigmatisation.**

In light of the complex and multi-faceted nature of such contributing factors that need to be addressed, all relevant international standards recognise that investment in offender rehabilitation and reintegration programme plays a key role in successfully returning ex-offenders to the community.

This includes **the Mandela Rules** which highlights that the period of imprisonment shall be used to ensure the reintegration of offenders into society so that prison serves its core purpose; that is, to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. To this end, the Rules reaffirms **the role of various stakeholders, including both government and non-government agencies,** in assisting individualised rehabilitation plan for prisoners.

Moreover, **the Bangkok Rules** suggests that rehabilitation and reintegration programme for women offenders should be developed by taking into account the circumstances and gender-specific needs and **in close cooperation with other service providers, local community groups as well as non-governmental organisations.**

In line with these international guidelines, I would like to share with you today some initiatives from countries in Southeast Asia that demonstrate the importance of the collaborative efforts between various actors.

The first example is **Lila Thai Massage Centre**. Lila Thai Massage Centre which was set up in Chiang Mai province, Thailand in 2014 was born out of collaboration between private business sector and prison. While the Chiang Mai Women's Correctional Institution offers a well-designed training for the prisoners to be equipped with the necessary skills through its vocational programme, including on-the-job training outside the prison, the training alone is not a guarantee of successful employment as professional masseuses upon release. Recognizing that most women prisoners are primary caretaker of their family, the idea for a continuing support as provided by the Lila Center was borne to address such needs. The Lila Center provides the seamless support upon release by offering employment to women prisoners from Chiang Mai Correctional Institution, taking into account their needs for work with decent payment. The women earn the equivalent of USD\$950 per month, which is more than twice the average monthly income in Thailand.

Situated in one of Thailand's booming tourism hubs, the Centre became not only a successful model of integrated approach to social reintegration of ex-offenders but also an unprecedented and viable business model, which now expands its branches to six different locations within Chiang Mai. Successful employment under the Lila model also contributes to the social acceptance of ex-offenders by demonstrating to the public that ex-offenders are not only the law-abiding members of society, but also the full-fledged members of the community capable of contributing to the local economy.

Now, in my next example, I would like to move from the local initiative to a systematic effort in Singapore by the **Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network**. The CARE Network was founded in May 2000 to coordinate and improve the effectiveness among many agencies' efforts in engaging rehabilitative works for ex-offenders in Singapore. Currently, there are nearly 9,000 inmates released from prison each year. The transition from prison to the outside world is fraught with difficulties such as stigmatization and marginalization. With this in mind, the CARE Network was established to gather greater community support and involvement.

I believe it is the very first formal structure in Southeast Asia that brings together the key players in the society—be it volunteers from the grassroots, religious groups, the public and private sectors, civil society organizations, and social enterprises—to promote smooth in-care and after-care support for ex-offenders. Deepening community engagement is one of the most crucial factors in the reintegration journey of the ex-offenders. Thus, CARE Network acts as a tight-knitted alliance, which pools resources and expertise, as well as coordinates innovative initiatives under the belief that it is “more effective acting together, rather than doing it alone.”

The third example is a recent initiative of the TIJ that aims to engage stakeholders from various sectors in the society. As part of the **TIJ Executive Program on the Rule of Law and Development (RoLD)**, we have been working with leadership groups from the government and business sector in Thailand encouraging them to take part in promoting the rule of law and addressing social justice. The underlying principle of the RoLD programme recognizes the power of the community and the potential of social partnerships in dealing with justice issues. At the beginning phase TIJ provides a platform where our participants can

pick and choose social issues to discuss and exchange their ideas. Subsequently we mobilize expertise of our participants in various fields such as technology, law, finance, marketing, media or management by providing a testing ground for their innovative solutions.

This year in particular, one group of participants has chosen to tackle the issue of recidivism. Using an offender-centric approach, a series of focus group and informal consultation meetings have been organized to hear first-hand experiences from people who were incarcerated in order to collect and test ideas. The programme emphasizes that through **justice innovation and creative forms of public-private collaboration**, we may be able to reduce recidivism in a new and meaningful way. Instead of relying solely on the State to solve all the social problems, we believe that the active involvement of the citizen indicates a mature state of the society and, as we see it, could potentially provide alternative solutions to many deep-rooted problems. Although this is still a work in progress, it is our hope that the RoLD programme will bring about changes in **the role of business and private sectors in shaping the inclusive society and creating social impact that can be captured and measured**.

The key takeaways from the three examples I mentioned would be that:

First, intervention of this kind must aim to tackle **the root causes of recidivism**. Providing an opportunity to gain adequate skill and employment for prisoners, in turn, also effectively proves to the public that ex-offenders are worthy of receiving a second chance. It removes a high wall built on the stigma and marginalisation between ex-offenders and the rest of the community.

Second, it also should embrace **a development-led approach** by focusing on the impact of offenders' rehabilitation and reintegration on wider society,

instead of merely seeing its impact on individual's life. Returning a law-abiding citizen and economically productive labour to society increases **the potential for social and economic development of the community**. Reduced reoffending also means **a safer and more peaceful society**, which is in the heart of Sustainable Development Goals.

Last but not least, none of these examples would be successful without **integrated multi-agency approach** that aims for holistic outcomes.

I would like conclude my presentation by emphasizing that effective rehabilitation and social reintegration programs require efforts from every level of the society. The efforts would need to come from the offenders themselves, criminal justice agencies, community and private sector.

And despite some of the good practices found in the region, we cannot deny the fact that over-reliance on imprisonment is and will always be one of the key factors that can seriously hinder an offender's social reintegration. Therefore, besides promoting collaboration among all stakeholders and assisting ex-prisoners through a supportive system of reintegration, we as policy makers and practitioners need to work together to ensure that imprisonment is being used as the last resort and that efforts being put in the prevention of crime at the first place.

Thank you.
