



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

PRESS NOTE

New Delhi, 22nd April, 2020:

The National Commission for Women has written an **advisory/recommendation to all States Director General and Inspector General of Prisons today**, on highlighting the current situation arising out of the pandemic of COVID-19, and it demands special attention to the Women Wards of Prisons and Correctional Homes in the Country.

Some of the points of advisory/recommendation of the Commission are:

1. NCW earlier repeatedly brought the pitiable condition of female inmates in prisons but in the current situation of COVID19 pandemic, it is imperative that the recommendations of the Commission made earlier are implemented forthwith, and while doing so all the precautions that has become essential due to the COVID-19 situation should also be adhered to. Any slackness on the part of the Prison authorities may result in the situation of prisons getting out of hand posing a serious threat to the life of women inmates.
2. It is in this context that Commission would like you to ensure that immediate action is taken to decongest the overcrowded women wards of the prisons, provide them beds with enough moving space in between the beds or in cases where raised platforms are provided in close vicinity, occupancy should be arranged in a manner that the norm of social distancing is maintained. Provisions needed for the maintenance of cleanliness in the women wards should be provided forthwith and that should include Bed sheets, pillow covers, pairs of clean uniform/clothes, sanitary napkins, under garments, basic cosmetics, soap in enough quantity, detergent for washing clothes, shampoo, hair oil, tooth paste/brush etc. Sanitisation of the women ward at reasonable intervals in collaboration with local civic authority should be undertaken, ensuring that the entire premises is kept clean and in hygienic condition, with no overflow or chocking of the sewers and drainage. Adequate number of Toilets with running flush, bath rooms and wash basins are provided with arrangements for constant supply of water. Also, all the women inmates should be provided with masks, hand gloves and sanitizers. The inmates should be encouraged to wash their hands at regular interval avoid touching their faces and grouping together breaking the norm of social distancing.
3. Since the number of under-trials women prisoners, languishing for a long period, is very significant, one way to decongest the women ward is to ensure prompt legal action to get them released on bail. This matter, therefore, should be taken up with State Legal Services Authority (SLSA)/ District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) and it should be ensured that the Bail application in respect of all the women under trials is placed before the Competent Court with positive recommendation from the prosecution side, keeping in view the current situation. Even the cases of those women under trials who are charged for non-bailable offences leading to a penalty of death or life imprisonment, if found guilty, needs to be processed for bail under proviso to the Section 437 (1) (ii) of Cr.Pc., which provides for special dispensation to women and children below the age of 16 years in the matter of grant of bail. Services of Senior Advocate through SASA/DLSA need to be obtained specifically for this purpose for all the women under trials irrespective of any request made by them for legal Aid. Action for release of the convicted prisoners on parole, leave etc., may also needs to be considered favourably.
4. The healthcare services in the prisons, particularly during the period of lockdown, should be augmented, with provisions for medical check-up and arranging for services of the Specialists like Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Psychiatric Social Worker, Gynaecologist, on visit basis in the prison itself. Prison authorities should also arrange and encourage video conferencing of the prisons with their family members, as it is essential for the psychological and mental wellbeing and strength of the Prisoners and their family members.
5. Furthermore the Commission requested that during this tough time, the prison authorities would adopt a therapeutic approach and treat the women inmates with compassion. The Commission suggested to intimate various measures taken by State Prison authorities and respective Prison Superintendents on the above recommendations, which is essential to prevent the spread of COVID-19 virus in the prisons.