



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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## Press Statement

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### Leave no one behind during this pandemic

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) urges the government not to ignore the plight of two important community segments – undocumented migrant workers and stateless Malaysians – on humanitarian grounds as well as a concern for their access to health care in dire times like this.

It was reported that more than 1,000 thousand of undocumented migrant workers were arrested in May 2020 by the authorities during the Movement Control Order. Those caught were placed in overcrowded detection centres which later became hotspots for the spread of Covid-19.

Such raids conducted for undocumented migrant workers sparked fears and this could push them into hiding, thereby worsening their precarious living conditions and access to health care which contributed significantly to the spread of the virus.

Although it was claimed that it was part of the government's targeted approach to screen them for Covid-19 at detention centres, it didn't appear to convince them of the government's intention. Moreover, the virus is going to spread like wildfire in the cramped environment of the detention centres.

We urge the government to grant a real amnesty to these undocumented migrant workers to encourage them to register for vaccination. In mid-February 2021, the government declared that undocumented migrants will not be arrested during the mass Covid-19 vaccination programme. However, on 29 May 2021, the Home Ministry reversed the decision, saying that the Malaysian immigration department will start arresting them and imposing fines for illegal workers after 30 June 2021. Since that announcement, numerous raids have been conducted.

Our contention is that the threat of arresting and imposing fines on the illegal migrant workers will drive them into hiding and develop a distrust of the authorities because of flip-flop decisions. Why don't the government, instead of bringing in migrant workers, grant amnesty to the existing undocumented migrant workers for them to apply for proper documentation for a gainful employment.

There is yet another forgotten group, the stateless Malaysians who do not have a Malaysian identity card or a birth certificate. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were an estimated 12,400 of them from West Malaysia alone in 2017. The population of stateless people in East Malaysia comprising the Bajau Laut, children of Filipino and Indonesian migrant workers, street children/welfare homes, and nomadic indigenous people is unknown.

These people do not have proper documentation and therefore are denied basic rights to education, jobs, and even healthcare of which Covid-19 vaccination is one.

We iterate our call to the government to address the concerning the undocumented migrant workers and the stateless people out of compassion as well as to save both the people and the economy as best it could.

Given that we are living in unprecedented times we should stop to consider whether the immigration status of a being, overrides their position of being a human. Human life and the containment of the virus should be of paramount concern over that of the document a person holds, in this dire situation.

The overarching concern here is that every life matters.

**Mohideen Abdul Kader**

**President**

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