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Dear Minister,

Lockdown hours in correctional facilities – response requested by COB 14.4.20

I am writing to express my concern regarding reports of extended “lockdown” hours that could potentially amount to solitary confinement in correctional facilities around New Zealand. These reports have included my office being contacted directly [REDACTED]. This is consistent with other examples from other facilities reported in the media this week.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisons define solitary confinement as confinement of prisoners **for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact.**

I also note that human rights standards make clear that the prohibition of torture, cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment **cannot be derogated from, even during exceptional circumstances and emergencies which threaten the life of the nation.** The United Nations Committee against Torture’s long-standing recommendation has been that solitary confinement might constitute torture or inhuman treatment and should be regulated as a measure of last resort to be applied in exceptional circumstances, for as short a time as possible and under strict supervision including being subjected to judicial review. Solitary confinement should be prohibited as a punishment for juveniles, prisoners with psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities, as well as for others in situations of special vulnerability, including pregnant women, women with infants, and breastfeeding mothers.

I appreciate that Corrections is working to prevent COVID-19 from entering or spreading in correctional facilities in order to protect the right to health for prisoners and staff. However it is essential that all human rights standards are upheld, especially during these unprecedented times. It is of particular concern that there are reports of this occurring across the country in multiple facilities.

I therefore would appreciate information from your office by 5pm, Tuesday 14th April regarding the following:

- **The use of lockdown hours longer than 22 hours in correctional facilities across New Zealand in the last 14 days;**
- **The use of lockdown hours longer than 22 hours without meaningful human contact in correctional facilities across New Zealand in the last 14 days.**
- **If this information is not available for all facilities by the deadline, a sample of some facilities’ data on the above would be appreciated.**

Given the normal functioning of OIA requests is not necessarily available to civil society at this time, thank you for your timely assistance on this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Meg de Ronde
Executive Director
Amnesty International New Zealand