The outbreak of COVID-19 has brought the entire world to a standstill. On top of taking lives, the pandemic is devastating economies globally and adding risk to international security and stability. Nations, and societies are striving to control the spread of the pandemic by enforcing lockdowns that are driving masses into financial insecurity.
The outbreak of COVID-19 has had unprecedented health, social and economic impacts on all countries. Pakistan is no exception and has witnessed a significant increase in its confirmed COVID-19 cases since 26th February 2020, when the pandemic emerged in the country. As of 29th May 2020, there are approximately 64,000 confirmed cases. In addition to threatening human lives, COVID-19 is also posing major challenges to the Rule of Law and Governance, and Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Agencies, Prisons and Drug Rehabilitation Centres face distinctive challenges not experienced before.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also having a serious impact on livelihoods and the economy in Pakistan, and is reversing some of the gains Pakistan has made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This situation also increases vulnerability to criminal opportunism and exploitative behaviour, as people struggle to survive and criminals take advantage of weaknesses in supply chains and demands for goods that are scarce.

To address these COVID-19 related concerns, UNODC Pakistan has developed a comprehensive policy document on COVID-19 responses related to its ongoing work on Strengthening Pakistan’s Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice and Health efforts. This document has been developed based on principles of partnership, inclusiveness, gender mainstreaming and promotion of human rights.
Pakistan, a country of 220 million people with high levels of poverty, and where a significant part of the population is engaged in the informal economy, faces unprecedented challenges with the emergence of COVID-19. Immediately after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, the Government of Pakistan unveiled a National Action Plan imposing selective lockdowns across Pakistan. It has brought law enforcement agencies to the forefront, as they have to support the health related mitigation measures, and maintain compliance and law and order across the country.

From a law and order perspective, there have already been new challenges. With an increased demand for health emergency equipment and medicines, organized criminal groups and individuals are looking for ways to profit, by resorting to hoarding and diverting medical supplies, bribing and supplying substandard equipment. Due to the closure of educational institutes and a high number of people working from home, there is increased vulnerability to cybercrime including online fraud, phishing and identity theft. As most of the Government’s focus remains on delivering health emergency responses, transnational organized groups also continue to exploit the situation, and continue illicit drug trafficking and cross border smuggling. The present uncertainty has placed additional burden on Criminal Justice Institutions including prosecution, prisons and courts. At the same time, the prison population has also remained exposed to the pandemic due to overcrowding and unhygienic conditions, and court closures can also negatively impact related judicial processes. The socioeconomic impact – besides posing enormous challenges to the Government’s efforts to revive the economy – is also threatening human rights of the poor and most vulnerable. There are also concerns of an increasing incidence of domestic and gender-based violence. UNODC continues to address all of these important needs on an urgent basis in the COVID-19 environment through the twelve intervention areas as indicated below.

Pakistan’s National Action Plan was developed and approved on March 13, to:

(i) contain and respond to the outbreak in a timely and efficient manner;

(ii) prioritise financial resources and increase the domestic and international investment for country emergency preparedness; and

(iii) implement emergency preparedness actions by strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration with government sectors, private sector and civil society at the provincial level.
UNODC’s Response

- Deliver Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to Police, Prisons and Criminal Justice officials;
- Develop and distribute policy briefs and advocacy materials, such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to enhance the knowledge and skills of law enforcement agencies and prison staff on the risks associated with COVID-19;
- Convene regular webinars and virtual workshops for stakeholders in Pakistan to continue delivering technical assistance during the pandemic;
- Increase awareness amongst public by holding targeted awareness campaigns to promote social distancing and prevention measures against COVID-19;
- Develop and disseminate specific technical guidance on HIV service provision for people who use drugs and people in prisons in the context of COVID-19 prevention and control;
- Develop advocacy and communication material on corruption, terrorism prevention, gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19; and
- Promote regional cooperation and share best practices with stakeholders in Pakistan.

The Nelson Mandela Rules

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners

Nelson Mandela

“...it is said that no one truly
honors a nation until one has
honored its jails. A nation should not be
judged by how it treats its highest
citizen, but its lowest one.”

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela International Day

Promote humane conditions of imprisonment
Raise awareness about prisoners being a core human part of society
Value the work of prison staff as an important social service

18
July
18

In honour of the legacy of
Nelson Mandela, who spent
27 years in prison, the rules
are known as the
Nelson Mandela Rules.
UNODC is delivering assistance in the country in close collaboration with the Government of Pakistan through joint programming, to address the challenges emanating from drugs, crime and terrorism. UNODC, through its long term engagement in Pakistan since 1974, is providing customized technical assistance to meet the emerging strategic priorities of the host country.

While working in cooperation with international organisations, donor partners, UN entities and civil society – UNODC promotes partnerships to meet obligations under the various drug, crime and terrorism conventions and instruments. The office strengthens technical skills and knowledge of law enforcement agencies, criminal justice practitioners and drug demand reduction-related federal and provincial institutions, as well as facilitates wider regional cooperation.

By showcasing international best practices into the country, UNODC is complementing various national initiatives, hence contributing directly to Government of Pakistan’s efforts to achieve various targets of the SDGs, with the overall aim to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’.