

## **2023 ANNUAL REPORT OF VOICE FOR PRISONERS LIMITED**

I have the pleasure of reporting the activities of Voice for Prisoners Limited in 2023.

We support prisoners through payment of education courses, a radio programme and visits to prisoners. Through social media we raise awareness both locally and in overseas countries of the harsh penalties in Hong Kong for drug mules. We also support defendants through the court process.

Our NGO has various pillars and I report as follows:

### **INTERNATIONAL ANTI-DRUG TRAFFICKING CAMPAIGN**

**No Mas Mulas / No More Mules – our campaign warning vulnerable people at risk of becoming drug mules**

**No Mas Mulas – our Spanish language campaign in Latin America**

Hong Kong has extremely long and punitive prison sentences for drug trafficking. Our campaign warns vulnerable people at risk of becoming drug mules by sharing prisoners' stories online and campaigning at the source. By the use of social media we spread the message and increase awareness within the communities most targeted by drug traffickers in Latin America.

**No More Mules** is our campaign for the rest of the world in particular Africa.

Similar to No Mas Mulas, our campaign's mission is to raise awareness of the risks of trafficking drugs to Hong Kong with its extremely long and punitive prison sentences.

We also share prisoners' stories and by campaigning at the source, we help to spread the message and inspire change within the communities most targeted by drug traffickers in Africa and Asia.

Father John Wotherspoon, our CEO, who created the campaign in 2013 and Jane Chow, our COO, visited various countries in Asia, Africa and South America on a two month trip from December 2023 to February 2024. They made many good contacts in the law enforcement area, met former prisoners and families of present prisoners and obtained substantial publicity in the local media of various countries.

Due to the significant reduction in air travel due to Covid 19, the number of people charged in Hong Kong with trafficking drugs from overseas greatly reduced. However, after the opening up of Hong Kong after the pandemic in September 2022, drug mules returned to Hong Kong. We continue to assist defendants who were arrested mainly at Hong Kong International Airport when they appear before the Courts. These people required assistance with their defence, and many helped with the campaign by writing letters advising people not to traffic drugs to Hong Kong because of the harsh penalties.

By participating in our campaign, defendants may be considered eligible for small reductions to their sentences. Since the launch of our anti-drug trafficking campaign, the number of drug mules entering Hong Kong from Africa and South America has reduced significantly.

As mentioned in previous Annual Reports, we continued to witness a trend where drugs were sent to Hong Kong by post or courier. Many people, particularly foreign domestic helpers, were induced to collect these parcels from the Post Office and were caught by either the Police or Customs.

In 2021, we received a grant from the Government trust fund called Beat Drugs Fund and were able to employ 2 part employees, a project manager and a creative digital strategist, to promote our message both locally and overseas. We have worked closely with domestic helper charities Enrich and PathFinders and young sex workers charity Teen's Key to spread our message.

In 2022, we received a further grant from the Beat Drugs Fund for two years to carry on with our campaign and to work with our NGO Partners, Enrich, Pathfinders, Teen's Key and an ethical employment agency called Fair Employment.

## **PRISON VISITATION ON AIR**

Hong Kong prisoners are allowed only one ten-minute phone call every month. The weekly hour-and-a-half radio segment ***Prison Visitation on Air*** by-passes that strict regulation. The radio programme has become a critical lifeline for prisoners, especially foreigners, who have no local family support. Prisoners and their families can phone in requests to play special songs and exchange messages in many languages.

In 2023, Voice for Prisoners provided funding for this radio programme – the only English-language radio show catering to non-Chinese inmates – on air. It is hosted by Bruce Aitken and airs every Sunday evening on AM 1044 Metro Plus.

In December 2023, Far East Masonic Benevolence Fund Corporation donated to us HK\$ 156,000 as a contribution to the cost of the radio programme in 2024

## **EDUCATION FUND**

We believe that education is the key to success after a prisoner is released from prison. We provide financial aid for educational courses and procurement of educational materials in various languages.

As stated in our 2022 Annual Report, we were successful in our application to Operation Santa Claus, a joint fundraising project of RTHK and the South China Morning Post. The grant of HK\$800,000 for education courses for prisoners is to be spent over a period of two years.

## **FUND RAISING**

During the year we received donations from various sources as our work became known to those who wish to help those who are in prison.

## **VISITS TO PRISONERS AND POSTAL SERVICE**

We organize a group of volunteers to either write to or visit prisoners. We now have 45 volunteers.

We also continue to help prisoners with speeding up communications to their loved ones by using technology.

## **THANKS**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our volunteers who help our NGO and in particular our Prison Chaplains, Father John Wotherspoon, Dr. Tobias Brandner and the Rev. Will Newman and our staff Jane Chow and Flora Ho.

John Budge SBS JP

Chairman