

The First ASEAN-Japan Criminal Justice Seminar: Promoting the Rule of Law and Building an Inclusive Society (OTR Session)

“Countermeasures against Overpopulation of Prisons within the ASEAN Region, with a focus on Challenges and Developments regarding Non-custodial Measures and the Treatment of Offenders”

1. Duration and Participants

- From 11 to 19 December 2024
- 11 overseas participants from 10 jurisdictions
- 2 participants from Japan

2. Programme Overview

This programme addressed the critical issues of prison overcrowding within the ASEAN region with a particular focus on promoting non-custodial measures, ensuring effective prison management, and advancing rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. The programme examined the current situation and challenges of addressing prison overcrowding in the ASEAN region and explored effective countermeasures while encouraging the implementation of non-custodial measures. Through participants’ presentations, expert lectures and group discussions, the programme aimed to enhance their knowledge for strengthening offender treatment and rehabilitation efforts in their respective jurisdictions while fostering mutual trust and understanding as a foundation for a network of criminal justice practitioners committed to these efforts within the ASEAN Region.

3. Contents of the Programme

(1) Lecturers

The following visiting expert from overseas, as well as UNAFEI faculty members, gave lectures:

- Visiting Expert
 - Dr. Danijela Mrhar Prelić
Director General of the Slovenian Probation Administration
Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Slovenia
“The Development of the Slovenian Probation Service”
“Probation System from a European Perspective”

(2) Country Presentations

The participants shared the practices and the challenges in their respective jurisdictions regarding the theme of the programme through their country presentations.

(3) Observation Visits

The participants visited the Tachikawa Detention House and the Halfway House Step Oshiage to learn efforts and practices regarding offender treatment and rehabilitation.

(4) Creation and Presentation of Action Plans

The participants concluded the programme by presenting their own action plans to the fellow participants and faculty of UNAFEI, focusing on the challenges they identified, possible solutions, as well as what they learned in the lectures, presentations by colleagues and discussion.

4. Feedback from the Participants

Most participants found the programme meaningful, noting that they were able to obtain a comprehensive understanding of good practices in non-custodial measures and offender rehabilitation, including the role of community volunteers in reintegration and the multi-stakeholder approach for social reintegration. They also reported that the programme was effective in establishing a network among their fellow criminal justice practitioners within the ASEAN Region. On the other hand, some participants noted that the two-week duration was too short to allow sufficient time for in-depth discussions or a comprehensive understanding of the Japanese criminal justice system and its cultural background. We appreciate all the feedback from the participants and will take it into account when planning our future programmes.

5. Comments from the Programming Officer

This new seminar, dedicated to ASEAN Member States, was launched to enhance effective international cooperation in enhancing offender rehabilitation. Given the longstanding challenges of prison overcrowding in many ASEAN countries, the first seminar highlighted the countermeasures to address the challenge. While focusing on recent developments and challenges in implementing non-custodial measures, community-based treatment and effective prison management, this programme aimed to analyse and discuss the current situation, share good practices and to propose effective countermeasures.

Through this programme, knowledge and experience were shared among participants. In particular, the experiences and initiatives of the visiting expert who developed the probation service in Slovenia, the role of community volunteers in supporting offender reintegration (e.g. Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Japan) and efforts to raise public awareness (e.g. the Yellow Ribbon Project in Singapore and the Yellow Feather Campaign in Japan) captured the participants' interest and sparked active discussions.

In their action plans, the participants identified key challenges and solutions, including creating rehabilitative prison environments, promoting community corrections, enhancing rehabilitation and reintegration, strengthening collaboration with stakeholders and increasing public awareness. These efforts are fundamental to reducing reoffending, and I sincerely hope that by promoting their plans, participants will contribute to reducing prison population and promoting desistance in their respective countries.

Through this programme, I believe the participants have reinforced regional momentum toward developing more effective systems for offender treatment and rehabilitation. We hope the knowledge gained will be applied to strengthen and enhance the systems within each participant's jurisdiction.