

While many drug traffickers are only seeking a quick profit, we chaplains meet many others who were tricked or forced into their crime

These people should be treated rather as victims of human trafficking than as drug traffickers in their own right

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I refer to your article, "Narcos: the hidden drug highways linking Asia and Latin America" (November 25). The article explains well how drug trafficking is a highly lucrative part of global trade. However, what needs to be addressed also are the questionable sentencing policies with which Hong Kong punishes these same drug mules.

While I appreciate that Hong Kong is slightly more lenient in its drug sentencing than some of its neighbouring jurisdictions, this should not be cause for complacency. There are different opinions in our society on the right length of sentencing; however, various elements in our present system do not, to me, make sense and are in fact inherently illogical.

First, all drugs are treated the same in sentencing although there is a huge difference in the dangers to health posed by heroin (more severe) and cocaine (less severe).

Second, judges commonly add a so-called international element to the sentence for trafficking in cases where traffickers were caught at the border (Hong Kong International Airport or one of the ports). This international element adds one or two years to the sentence for trafficking.

Local drug traffickers, producers or owners do not receive this additional penalty, although they

are usually more highly involved in crime compared to the foreign, often desperate, drug mules that are so well described in your article. This seems to me very unjust.

Third, drug sentencing is the only sentence where judges do not take into account mitigating factors. Many of the foreign drug mules agree to traffic in drugs due to considerable hardship. It seems to me irrational, unethical and unjust to exclude such mitigating factors.

Hong Kong's appalling record for convicting drug lords revealed

Fourth, the 25-year sentence for drug trafficking of the person described in the article is roughly equivalent to a life sentence. It is inherently inconsistent to equate the trafficking of an illegal substance to the crime of premeditated murder, for example.

While many drug traffickers are in it for a quick profit, we chaplains meet many others who were tricked or forced into their crime. These people should be treated rather as victims of human trafficking than as drug traffickers in their own right. At present, the Hong Kong judiciary seems not to distinguish between the two.

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