

Dr Margaret Chan

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World Health Organization
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13 May 2004

Miss Flora Tai
Clerk to Select Committee
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central, Hong Kong

Fax: (852) 2248 2011

Dear Madam,

**Select Committee to inquire into the handling of
The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome outbreak by
The Government and the Hospital Authority**

In response to your letter dated 10 May 2004 by fax requesting for information to four questions, I am happy to assist the Select Committee and have set out below the answers to your questions to the best of my recollection.

At the risk of repetition, I would stress again that my testimony is in my capacity as the former Director of Health at the time of the SARS epidemic and is not related to official duties at the World Health Organization (WHO).

- (a) A Health, Welfare and Food Bureau Task Force meeting was held in the afternoon of 30 March 2003, Dr E.K. Yeoh, Secretary of Health, Welfare and Food ordered the isolation of Block E of Amoy Gardens

at the close of the meeting. As there was no discussion on the matter, I was unable to give any opinion.

(b) Immediately following that meeting, I called an urgent meeting with my senior staff in the Department of Health to discuss the order from Dr E.K. Yeoh, Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food.

After careful consideration, it was our view that the implication and many questions associated with the implementation of issuing the Isolation Order were not clearly addressed nor fully discussed. For example:

- (i) What are the criteria for triggering off an isolation order to restrict movements of residents in respect of other blocks of Amoy Gardens, and other estates?
- (ii) Is the action sustainable given the additional heavy workload on the law enforcement agencies and other departments to provide meals and other support services?
- (iii) What are the signals that this action will send to the local and international community?
- (iv) Have we looked at other equally good or even better options like compulsory attendance at the Designated Medical Centres (DMCs) or immediate removal of residents to camps?

(c) At the first available opportunity, I tried to contact Dr E.K. Yeoh, Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food to request a second meeting in the same evening to address the outstanding issues. Despite various attempts to get in touch with him and his office for almost two hours, I was unable to locate him. As this was a matter of great urgency, I approached Mr W.K. Lam, Director of the Chief Executive's Office, for assistance with the consent of Mrs Carrie Yau, Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food.

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(d) At the Chief Executive's Steering Committee meeting held in the evening of 30 March 2003, the policy implication, the concerns and the issues associated with the implementation of several different options to contain the situation in Amoy Gardens were fully discussed.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Margaret Chan

cc: Director of Health