

Hong Kong Human Rights Commission

Submission to Panel on Home Affairs

Legislative Council

**Views on the reports
on the ICESCR, CRC, CAT and the implementation of international
human rights treaties in Hong Kong
prepared by the Hong Kong SAR Government**

June 11, 2004

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(I) Introduction

1. This report by Hong Kong Human Rights Commission (the Commission) represents the submission to the Panel on Home Affairs in relation to the meeting of the Panel, 11 June 2004 to discuss the government's reports and outlines relating to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and The Implementation of International Human Rights Treaties in Hong Kong: 2003.

(II) ICESCR

Comments on the second report of HKSAR of the People's Republic of China in the light of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) submitted to the United Nations as part of China's initial report in June 2003

(a) General legal framework within which ICESCR is implemented

2. Please explain clearly the proposals from the government to ensure that government policies and domestic law will be compatible with Hong Kong's international treaty obligations.
3. Please explain the reasons of the Government for maintaining the reservations to certain articles of the Covenant and provide a time-frame for the HKSAR to review and withdraw these reservations.
4. At present, Article 39 of the Basic Law states that the ICESCR shall remain in force and implemented through the laws of Hong Kong. However, the ICESCR does not have legal binding force in the domestic legal system of Hong Kong. The Bill of Rights, which was largely extracted from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, has been transformed into domestic law, while the domestic legislation of the ICESCR has not yet been introduced. Please provide a detailed proposal to explain how the Government would bring it into practice.
5. According to the present legal aid policy, the upper limit of financial eligibility in meritorious cases may be waived by the Director of Legal Aid where a breach of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance or an in-consistency with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as applied to Hong Kong may be involved. Please indicate whether the government would introduce the same waiving scheme for cases related to the ICESCR.

6. In view of the last Concluding Observations on the first report by China/ Hong Kong issued by the CESCR, various recommendations have been rendered. Please indicate the progress, the follow-up afterwards and explain the reasons for why those recommendations have not yet been implemented.

(b) Issues relating to the general provisions of the covenant (Article 1 to 15)

Article 2: Non-discrimination

7. Please explain why the new immigrants from Mainland China will not be included in the legislation against racial discrimination.
8. Please provide an account of the reasons why reviews of existing discrimination ordinances and new amendments made to overseas discrimination laws are not taken into account in the proposed race discrimination law.
9. Given widespread discrimination based on age and sexual orientation, please provide detailed information on the progress of the legislation against such discrimination.
10. Research has shown that many ethnic minorities are not aware of the existence of government services, thus hindering their access to these services. Although the government has published guidebooks for ethnic minorities there is still a lack of general knowledge among the minorities. Please provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the current integration policy for ethnic minorities.

Article 6: Right to work

11. Please describe the measures undertaken to address the problem of unemployment among middle-aged unskilled laborers.
12. Research has shown that more than 40% of the ethnic minorities are out of jobs, which is much higher than the 7.2% among the overall population. Please provide an evaluation of the measures taken so far to address the problem of unemployment among ethnic minorities and state if there are any plans to address the problem.
13. Please provide statistics about the number of people successfully employed in the different employment programs created by the government and an evaluation of the respective programs.

Article 7: The right to just and favorable conditions of work

14. Given the absence of a statutory minimum wage in the HKSAR and the inhuman and extremely low income in general, especially among the contract workers of the government bodies, how does the government determine whether average earnings are sufficient to secure an adequate standard of living for workers and their families?
15. In view of the unfavorable situation for middle-aged workers, please explain how the government can ensure the elimination of age discrimination in the labour market.
16. Please explain what measures the government has taken so far regarding discrimination against ethnic minorities on wages and benefits.
17. The reduction of the monthly minimum wage for foreign domestic workers and the imposition of the Employers Retraining Levy represent indirect racial discrimination, as the reduction of the minimum wage is a badly disguised way to help the local workforce at the expense of ethnic minorities. Please explain whether the government has any plans to reverse the decision to lower the minimum wage for foreign domestic workers.
18. Underpayment and abuse of foreign domestic helpers are widespread and severe. However, although the government has set up a taskforce to combat underpayment among foreign domestic helpers such problems still exist. Please provide a progress report and evaluation of the work of the taskforce and the number of successful prosecutions of underpaying employers of domestic helpers.

Article 9: The right to social security

19. Please indicate whether the reduction of the basic rates of assistance paid through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme in 1999 and 2003 respectively can provide for a decent standard of living for the recipients.
20. Please explain the reasons for the introduction of the 7-year residence rule as the application criteria for the CSSA and discuss its impact to the new immigrants and ethnic minorities.
21. Please discuss whether there are any further assistance or subsidies provided for children living under poverty.
22. Please provide figures on the number of ethnic minority CSSA recipients who have been able to sponsor their families to come to Hong Kong on dependent visas.

23. Non-Chinese nationals who apply for permanent residence have to sign a declaration of having taken Hong Kong as their permanent residence. In the declaration they have to declare that they are able to support themselves without public funds. This requirement hinders many ethnic minorities from applying for social security. Please explain the background for this requirement and whether there are any plans to leave out such an unconstitutional requirement.

Article 10: The right to protection of the family

24. Many ethnic minorities live apart from their spouses or children because of the strict immigration rules regarding applications for dependent visas. This infringes their right to family life. Please provide statistics on the number of applications for dependent visas that have been received, rejected or approved.
25. Many new immigrants from Mainland China must currently wait for years before their applications for residence in Hong Kong are approved. Please provide a timetable to shorten the waiting time for the approval of One-way Entry Permits.

Article 11: The right to an adequate standard living

26. Please explain the reasons for not establishing an official poverty line and please provide data and the profile on the number of people who are living under poverty according to the definition of the Government.
27. Please provide up-to-date statistics on the number of inadequately housed persons in HKSAR and illustrate a time frame to eradicate this problem.

Article 12: The right to physical and mental health

28. Given that more than 350,000 ethnic minorities live in Hong Kong, please discuss in detail whether there are any plans to provide appropriate medical and health care services for the ethnic minorities, such as interpretation services.
29. Please discuss the impacts of the increase of the public hospitals' medical charges schemes and the self-buying drugs scheme to patients of different age and whether there are any measures to tackle this problem.

Article 13. The right to education

30. The Government's new school allocation system for ethnic minority children now means that the children can study in a Chinese school. However, many ethnic minority children face severe difficulties in schooling, especially learning Chinese. Furthermore they do not have adequate access to learn their own mother tongue languages. Please provide information on what measures the government has to support the children in integrating them into the mainstream schools and to learn Chinese. Further please explain whether there are any plans to provide mother tongue language teaching to all ethnic minority children and youth.

(III) CRC

Comments on the first report of HKSAR under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) submitted to UN as part of China's second report in June 2003.

31. The Commission welcomes the first report prepared by the SAR Government on the Convention. The details about the children in Hong Kong were extensively provided. However, the Government's report is not critical enough and many important areas regarding children's rights are ignored, especially when it comes to the lack of social policies and legislation.

32. Fundamentally speaking, in order to ensure the legal status of the CRC, it is recommended that the Government should have domestic legislation for the Convention and make it a legally binding document so that legal remedy is provided to protect the rights stated by the Convention.

Comments in relation to each article of the Convention

Article 10: Family unification

33. At present, there are more than 80,000 families split between Hong Kong and Mainland China. These families have to wait for over eight years for reunion. All applications have to go through mainland authorities while the SAR Government has no power to vet family reunion applications. In addition, one-way permits are granted on an individual basis instead of a family basis. The SAR Government

should outline the plans and timetable to discuss with the mainland Government on the improvement of the application system.

Article 26: The child's right to social security benefit

34. According to statistics, more than 350,000 children are living below the poverty line. In addition, the Government introduced a welfare cut of the basic standard rate of the Comprehensive Social Security Allowance (CSSA) in 2003. Many children on welfare received fewer subsidies. Worse still, the introduction of the 7-year residence rule as the application criteria for the CSSA. The Government should evaluate the impact of poverty on the children and their families. Also, the Government should explain whether further assistance or subsidies will be provided for these children.

Article 27: Standard of living

35. According to statistics, it is estimated that more than 22,000 children live in inadequate housing. Their living conditions are poor which adversely affect their growth and development. The government should provide the solutions to eradicate this problem and give reasons for not giving priority to public housing applicants with children on the waiting list for public housing.

36. Parents of ethnic minorities often change their place of residence due to the lack of information of the government resources, especially in the area of education, which adversely affects the education and training for the ethnic minority children. The Government should explain how to ensure sufficient information can be rendered to these families and whether there are induction courses for the ethnic minority adults.

Article 28: Right to education

37. The children of the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong have long been complaining of the lack of educational support from the Government. Many children have to attend private schools but without receiving good education. In 2004, the SAR Government has introduced a new school allocation system for the children of ethnic minorities so they can also apply for the Chinese schools. However, the

Government does not provide sufficient support for each school to prepare for the integration of children of ethnic minorities. The Government should explain whether it will have any supportive measures to prevent the racial discrimination in the school and ensure the ethnic minorities can integrate smoothly.

38. More than a hundred of children from the Mainland China, whose right of abode or residence status have not yet been verified, cannot receive education. The Government has to explain the reasons for not arranging temporary school placements for the children and explain how their right to education can be protected.

Article 30: Children belonging to minority or indigenous groups

39. Currently, not all ethnic minority children have the opportunity to learn their mother tongue language. Only a few schools offer courses in different minority languages. With the increasing number of the ethnic minorities' children, the Government should explain whether it has any measures to protect their rights for learning their own mother tongue language.

(IV) CAT

Comments on the Government's outline on the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) (Paper No. 2/2004)

40. The Commission welcomes the fact that the Home Affairs Bureau is consulting the public about the implementation of the Convention. The views of the public are important to facilitate a discussion of the human rights situation in Hong Kong and to broaden the understanding of the topic. However, the consultation process needs to be improved as the current situation is unsatisfactory regarding the format of the outline and the process of consultation.
41. First of all, it is highly dissatisfactory that the public is only consulted on the outline of the report. According to the United Nations Manual on Human Rights Reporting “ [the] complete draft should be circulated among Government officials, non-Governmental agencies, popular and representative groups, and other

resource persons, for their comments.”¹. The lack of proper involvement of the public in the drafting process lowers the quality of the report and further highlights the need to consciously work towards involvement of the public. Full involvement in the reporting process is one of the indicators of a democratic society.

42. Secondly, the quality of the outline itself needs to be improved. The outline only states that it will respond in the final report to specific concerns and recommendations related to specific articles, without specifying the contents of these responses. This is a serious obstacle for the public as it makes it nearly impossible to make a substantial comment as the Government’s position remains unknown to the public.
43. Thirdly, it is recommended that all the submissions received from the public should be made available not only in the full report with an index of the contributors, but also on the website of the Government.
44. It is recommended that the Government follows the recommendations from the UN Manual on Human Rights Reporting. The following constitute the comments on the outline of the Government on the Convention.

Comments in relation to each article of the Convention

Article 1: Defining “torture”

45. The Hong Kong SAR Government should explain why it has ignored the Recommendations of 9 May 2000 of the Committee Against Torture to widen the scope of the Crime (Torture) Ordinance (the Ordinance) so that all acts of torture, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, are included.
46. The Government should explain whether it has taken any measures to amend section 3(4) of the Crimes (Torture) Ordinance (Chapter 427) stating that it is a defense for a person charged with the offence of torture to prove that he had lawful authority, justification or excuse for that conduct.

¹ Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights 1997: *Manual on Human Rights Reporting*, Geneva, page 36.

47. According to section 5 of the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance (Cap 1) it shall not be construed as extending the definition of "public official" in subsection (1) to "public officer" within the meaning of section 3 of that Ordinance. In its definition, "public officer" means any person holding an office of emolument under the Government, whether such office is permanent or temporary. The Government should explain why the Crimes (Torture) Ordinance does not include public officers as being included in the ordinance.

Article 2: Legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture

48. There are not yet any prosecutions under the Crimes (Torture) Ordinance despite many cases of torture taking place in Hong Kong. Torture or abuse by police officers has been widely reported, and yet no one has yet been prosecuted under the Ordinance.

49. Also, the Crime (Torture) Ordinance is limited in what acts are covered. Only those acts that "inflict severe pain or suffering on others" are included, while other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment has been excluded from the Ordinance. Thus legislation and application are limited and do not cover all acts as defined in the Convention.

50. Besides, those amendments of the ordinances related to the torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment cannot provide overall protection to the citizens. In order to increase its legal binding effect, the Government should consider the domestic legislation of the convention.

Article 3: Torture as a ground for refusal to expel, return or extradite

51. Removal of Mainland children who did not qualify under the Certificate of Entitlement Scheme constitutes cruel and inhuman treatment as it infringes the right to family reunion. The Government should provide information on whether it has any plans to provide a channel for them to apply for right of abode.

52. The Government should state why Hong Kong SAR has not yet ratified the Refugee Convention. Also it should provide information on existing Government support to asylum seekers and refugees.

Article 6: Powers of detention

53. The Government should explain why it has ignored the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong on the Report of Arrest [Topic: 25] concerning the amendments of the Police Force Ordinance (Chapter 232), including the introduction of a clear legal time limit for detention without charges, the setting up of the custody officers, regular review of police detention, etc.

Article 8: extradition arrangements

54. The Fugitive Offenders Ordinance (Chapter 503) only applies to agreements between the SAR Government and other Governments other than the Central People's Government (Section 2. 1(a))². However, the SAR Government and the Mainland Government has been discussing the issue for more than 7 years. The Government should explain whether it is going to amend the ordinance in order to make it possible to include an agreement between the SAR and the PRC Government.

55. In addition, the Government should explain why it has not yet made any formal extradition agreement between the PRC and the SAR Government regarding the surrender of fugitive offenders³ or sentenced persons⁴, given the fact that torture and the death penalty still exists in the PRC.

Article 9: Mutual Assistance in relation to crimes of torture

56. Since the handover, there is a sharp increase in the number of Hong Kong residents detained in the Mainland China. Many of the detainees and their families have reported that they have faced different forms of human rights violations, including being detained past the time limit set by the mainland Criminal

² Hong Kong SAR Government had signed the order with the following countries under Fugitive Offenders Ordinances (Cap 503): Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Philippines, the United States of America.

³ Hong Kong SAR Government has signed the Surrender of Fugitive Offenders Agreements (SFOs) with the following countries: Australia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. (Legislative References) (As at 21.5.2003) (http://www.justice.gov.hk/table4_e.htm)

⁴ Hong Kong SAR Government has signed the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Agreements (TSPs) with the following countries: Italy, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States of America.

Procedural Law, being subject to different kinds of torture and inhuman treatment, lacking legal representatives and legal consultation services related to the mainland law etc.

57. The Government should explain why there is no agreement between the SAR Government and the PRC Government concerning mutual legal assistance in criminal matters⁵. It should state whether it has any plans to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance (Chapter 525) section 3(1), which states that the ordinance does not apply to criminal matters between Hong Kong and other parts of China. In addition, the Government should explain whether there will be any proposals for expanding the services provided for the Hong Kong residents being detained and serving the sentence in the Mainland, such as handling the complaints of torture or inhuman treatment during detention or imprisonment.

Article 10: Education and information on the prohibition of torture

58. The Government should outline what measures it has taken to train the police to treat people equally, when they are approached for help. Especially, understanding of the needs and background of marginalized groups, such as street sleepers, cage dwellers, new immigrants from Mainland China and ethnic minorities needs to be addressed.
59. One incident highlights the need for more comprehensive training of Government frontline officers. On 11 April 2004, Kim Shuk-ying, 31, and her two daughters - Yin-li, 6, and Tsz-wan, 5 - were killed just hours after she left a Government-run shelter and sought help from police. Kim, who arrived from the Mainland in January 2004, had sought refuge three times since February after claiming her husband had beaten her and abused their children. She left the shelter on the day she died after workers repeatedly warned her not to go home. An officer let the woman leave Tin Shui Wai police station alone after she had sought help on the day of the killings.

(Gazette References) (As at 21.5.2003) (http://www.justice.gov.hk/table5_e.htm)

⁵ Hong Kong SAR Government has signed the Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements (MLAs) with the following countries: Australia, Canada, France, Korea R.O., Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America. Agreements have been signed (but have not yet come into force) with the following countries: Ireland, Italy, the Philippines, Portugal and Ukraine.

(Legislative References) (As at 1.12.2003) (http://www.justice.gov.hk/table3_e.htm)

60. The tragedy highlights the need to provide training to social workers of the Social Welfare Department and members of the police force about handling of domestic violence and family problems. In this context the Government should provide information about the kind of training provided for social workers of the Social Welfare Department and members of the police force regarding handling of domestic violence and family problems.
61. The Government should explain why it has not created any legislation for compulsory counseling and reporting of elderly abuse cases.

Article 11: Review of interrogation rules, instructions, methods and practices for custody and treatment of persons arrested or detained

62. The Government should give a detailed account of the death of Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre inmate Cheung Chi-kin, and the four unexplained needle marks on his shoulder. Additionally, it should explain if it intends to separate the roles of the medical staff and the correctional services staff when giving treatment to inmates.

Article 13: Right of complaint

63. As the Complaints against Police Office (CAPO) is just a part of the Hong Kong Police Force, there has long been a strong criticism on its independence and the effectiveness of investigating complaints against the police. The Government should outline whether it has any plans to establish an independent complaint mechanism to replace (CAPO) to investigate complaints against officers. In addition, the Government should explain whether it has any plan to set up an independent complaint department for the disciplinary forces, such as the Immigration Department, Correctional Services Department, Independent Commissioner against Corruption and the Customs and Excise Department.
64. The Government should provide information on whether it plans to delegate power to the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) to handle requests for re-investigation of the complaints.

(V) Annual Progress Report

Issues to be taken up regarding The Report on the Implementation of international human rights treaties in Hong Kong: 2003. Issued by Home Affairs Bureau, May 2004.

65. Hong Kong Human Rights Commission welcomes the initiative to report annually on the development of human rights. This part of the submission represents the comments on the Report on the implementation of international human rights treaties in Hong Kong: 2003 issued by the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) in May 2004.
66. The Commission also welcomes the fact that the Home Affairs Bureau emphasizes that the report is *experimental* in its design as the current report needs to be heavily improved in order to serve the purpose of annually monitoring and reporting the human rights situation in Hong Kong.

Comments on the format of the report

67. The report should be made in accordance with the articles related to the respective covenants/conventions in order to provide a better overview of the topics covered.
68. At the moment the report only constitutes a very brief account of some major developments in the human rights field. However, it seriously lacks any effort to critically review policies and legislation as to whether they comply with the different human rights treaties. It is recommended that a critical evaluation of the progress of human rights, especially related to the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations treaty bodies, is made available for public scrutiny and discussion.
69. The current report only covers significant developments as specified by the responding government bureaus. However, such an arrangement is highly dissatisfying as some specific issues may not be included. Thus it should not be at the discretion of each bureau to respond. Rather the government should point to specific areas of improvement and have clear guidelines as to what should be mentioned in the report.
70. The report should not only involve the public to comment on what issues to be

included, but also related statutory bodies, such as the Equal Opportunities Commission or the Ombudsman, should be invited to submit reports. Thus the government should actively seek the opinions of the public and statutory bodies.

71. The above comments clearly indicate that there is a need for an independent National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as the current progress report does not evaluate and assess the development but only sums up briefly some developments without any critical assessment.

Comments on specific parts of the report

(Please refer to the comments regarding ICESCR and CAT above.)

A. ICCPR

1. The report only briefly describes the events related to the sacking of Mr. Patrick Yu in the Equal Opportunities Commission. However, the recent development regarding its board has not been mentioned. Please explain why seven commission board members of the Equal Opportunities Commission who have already served for six years or more have been reappointed, despite the six-year limit advocated by the Home Affairs Bureau in its review of the structure of statutory bodies.
2. The recent development in the area of constitutional reform highlights the fact that Hong Kong still has a long way to go to when it comes to involving its citizens in its government. The report should include a timetable for universal suffrage as regards to LegCO and the Chief Executive.

B. ICERD

1. The report does not seriously address the issues raised by several NGOs regarding the contents of the race discrimination bill. Thus the Commission recommends that the government should:
 - Explain why the consultation paper on legislation has been withheld until the new legislative year. It is unacceptable to fear politicization of the topic. In fact the topic in itself is political. Making legislation against racial discrimination a voting issue may put ethnic minorities on the top agenda and raise awareness of the issue.

- Explain why the government stands firm on excluding new immigrants from Mainland China from the legislation.
- Provide detailed account of why the definition of indirect discrimination will only be modeled on existing discrimination legislation and not the new definition of indirect discrimination in the Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003 of United Kingdom. While the current definition in the discrimination ordinances regards the application of a “requirement or condition” that may put the respective race in a disadvantage, according to the Race regulations, indirect discrimination occurs when “ an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice...would put persons of a racial or ethnic origin at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons” (www.cre.gov.uk/legaladv/art13_key.html).
- Provide information about what measures has been taken to promote understanding of what constitutes indirect discrimination.
- Explain why establishments with less than 6 employees are exempted from the legislation for 3 years, given the fact that a Code of Practice Against Discrimination in Employment on the Ground of Race has already been printed in 1998 by the HAB.
- Provide detailed information about the complaints about racial discrimination received by the Race Relations Unit, and provide information about the nature and contents of the complaint. Referring to the protection of the victims of discrimination as an excuse for not providing such information is not acceptable, as the information is anonymous.

Introduction of the Hong Kong Human Rights Commission

The Hong Kong Human Rights Commission is a coalition of eleven non-governmental organizations including religious, women, community and students groups. It was founded in March 1988.

Although coming from different backgrounds, we share in the belief of the dignity and respect of each person and that every man and woman has inherent rights. As the "Human race is one", the Commission member organizations consider that mutual respect, equality and freedom form the foundation on which a just, peaceful, and humane society is built.

Over the years, the Commission has endeavored to promote and protect the human rights of the community. Not only does Hong Kong lack a democratic political system, its legislation also allows the government substantial power so as to maintain social control. Civilians are forced to submit to this power and therefore justice often fails to prevail. The Commission has been gathering resources in order to consolidate civil power. By doing so we hope to arouse public concern to the level where the people will push the government to reform.

Since it was founded, in addition to lobbying for the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments to the law at local level, the Commission has also submitted reports to UN treaty bodies, attended hearings and lobbying at international level. Recognizing that public awareness and participation are vital to the development of human rights, the Commission has promoted human rights education through exhibitions, gatherings in schools and community centres. Although the Commission recognizes that its work has benefited may there is the lingering feeling that much more can be done.

Members of the Hong Kong Human Rights Commission:

Christians for Hong Kong Society
Hong Kong Catholic Youth Council
Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee
Hong Kong Christian Institute
Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students
Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union
Hong Kong Storehouse and Transportation Staff Association
Hong Kong Women Christian Council
Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese
Society for Community Organization
Student Christian Movement of Hong Kong

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