

11th April, 2016.

STOP DISCRIMINATION: COMMUNITY CALLS FOR CALM ON REFUGEE DEBATE

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, are increasingly concerned that recent inaccurate and irresponsible comments made regarding the refugee issue in Hong Kong are divisive and inflammatory. These comments are fueling a climate of fear and hostility towards both refugees and ethnic minorities alike, and run the risk of fracturing Hong Kong's diverse and vibrant community. If negative stereotyping and hostile attitudes are repeatedly placed in the public eye in this way, xenophobia and discrimination against both refugees and ethnic minorities will continue to increase.

For this reason we cannot in good conscience allow this to continue - it is undermining Hong Kong's social harmony. Instead, care must be taken not to exaggerate the refugee situation, nor to legitimize any form of discrimination. In shared concern, we are joined together to send out a call for calm. The politics of fear do not belong in Hong Kong. It is time for a sober and more reasoned approach.

We acknowledge that concerns have been raised following an increase in the number of protection claimants in Hong Kong and apparent abuses of the system. These concerns must be listened to, but matters must be kept in perspective, and international law should be upheld. In fact, Hong Kong actually has low levels of refugees. There is nothing remotely like a crisis and there is no need to search for dramatic measures – instead we must face up to the need to reduce delays, and to address the obvious inefficiencies in the Unified Screening Mechanism ('USM') system. These are complex problems, and so require nuanced approaches as well as constructive and informed dialogue, rather than resorting to divisions and blame.

Some of the proposals that have been put forward – such as Hong Kong's withdrawal from UN Convention Against Torture ('UNCAT') or closed detention camps – are ill-advised, disproportionate and rash; and some are in breach of international law. Not only would withdrawal from UNCAT fail to address the concerns raised about the refugee situation, but it would roll back the rights and protections of every resident of Hong Kong against being tortured, or exposed to other abuse. This would affect us all, and we should therefore resolutely defend the continued respect for international law. At present, Hong Kong rightly enjoys a reputation as a responsible and valued member of the modern international community. But withdrawal from UNCAT would be an embarrassing step backwards for a forward-looking city. Put simply, Hong Kong is better than this.

Equally, the mass detention of those seeking sanctuary is a draconian measure and which may violate principals of international law. It cannot be the answer. Not only would it be an expensive use of public funds and an extreme overreaction, it would merely warehouse the issue, and likely cause significant harm to those who are already highly vulnerable. There are plenty of international examples to highlight the failures and problems of detention. The UNHCR have repeatedly expressed their concern over the detention of people seeking international protection.

We are therefore now calling upon all parties, including the Hong Kong Government, to work together collaboratively in ensuring that a message goes out that is loud and clear - discrimination has no place in our society. We must not allow fear-mongering and short-sighted politics to erode human rights and the rule of law in Hong Kong. We can no longer be complacent about the negative portrayal of ethnic minorities and refugees.

List of Signatories (In alphabetical order):

Organizations and Parties

1. 617 Citizen Charter 六一七民間約章
2. Act Voice 精算思政
3. Action Q 大專同志行動
4. African Community of Hong Kong
5. Amnesty International Hong Kong 國際特赦組織香港分會
6. Amnesty International Club @ HKU
7. Artists Action 藝界起動
8. Asian Migrants Coordinating Body AMCB
9. Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants
10. Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network 亞太地區難民權利組織
11. Basel Mission Hong Kong
12. Cameroon Solidarity Union HK
13. Centre for Comparative and Public Law (CCPL), Faculty of Law, HKU
14. Chosen Power (People First Hong Kong) 卓新力量
15. Christian Action 基督教勵行會
16. Church Refugee Ministry
17. City Concern of Christians Fellowship 基督徒社關團契
18. Civil Human Rights Front 民間人權陣線
19. Civic Party 公民黨
20. Cultural Outings 文化交遊
21. Comma Press
22. Daly & Associates 帝理律師行
23. Filguys Association Hong Kong
24. Free to Run
25. Frontline Tech Workers 前線科技人員
26. Franciscan Order Hong Kong JPIC Group 方濟會正義和平組
27. Friends of Conscience 良心之友
28. Global Youth Connect
29. Grassroot Cultural Centre
30. Health in Action 醫護行者
31. Helpers for Domestic Helpers
32. Hong Kong Buildings Management and Security Workers General Union 香港物業管理及保安職工總會
33. Hong Kong Christian Institute 香港基督徒教會
34. Hong Kong Christian Council Justice and Social Concern Committee 香港基督教協進會社會公義與民生關注委員會
35. Hong Kong Christian Service 香港基督教服務處
36. Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions 香港職工會聯盟
37. Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions 香港亞洲家務工工會聯會
38. Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor 香港人權監察
39. Hong Kong Labour Party 工黨
40. Hong Kong Policy Viewers 香港政策透視
41. Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union 香港教育專業人員協會
42. Hong Kong Psychologists Concern 良心理政
43. Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union 香港社會工作者總工會

44. Hong Kong Unison 香港融樂會
45. Hong Kong Women Workers' Association 香港婦女勞工協會
46. Hiu Lai Campaigning 曉麗關注 Plus
47. Inter-Agency Forum, Members of
48. Interfaith Cooperation Forum
49. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims
50. IT Voice IT 呼聲
51. Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese 香港天主教正義和平委員會
52. Justice Centre Hong Kong
53. KELY Support Group 啟勵扶青會
54. Kowloon Union Church 九龍佑寧堂
55. Labour Party 工黨
56. League in Defense of Hong Kong's Freedoms 保衛香港自由聯盟
57. League of Social Democrats 社會民主連線
58. Left 21 左翼 21
59. Love and Peace Ministry 仁愛和平事工
60. Methodist International Church 循道衛理會國際禮拜堂
61. Mission for Migrant Workers
62. Mission to New Arrivals Ltd 新福事工協會
63. Open Door 家·傭同行
64. PIME Missionaries Social Concern Group
65. Pink Alliance 粉紅同盟
66. Progressive Lawyers Group 法政匯思
67. Progressive Teachers' Alliance 進步教師聯盟
68. Queer Theology Academy 性神學社
69. Reclaiming Social Work Movement 社工復興運動
70. Refugee Concern Network 關注難民網絡
71. Right of Abode University 居留權大學
72. RiverGrace International Christian Fellowship
73. Social Justice Alliance
74. Society for Community Organization 香港社區組織協會
75. Society of St. Vincent De Paul, St. Teresa's Parish Conference 聖德肋撒堂聖雲先會
76. Solomon's Porch
77. St Andrew's Church 聖公會聖安德烈堂
78. St John's Cathedral 聖公會聖約翰座堂
79. Thai Migrant Worker's Union 泰國移工工會
80. The Association for the Advancement of Feminism 新婦女協進會
81. The Department of Anthropology, CUHK
82. The Hong Kong Society for Asylum-seekers and Refugees 香港尋求庇護者及難民協會
83. The India Association Hong Kong 印度協會
84. The Italian Women's Association
85. The Professional Commons 公共專業聯盟
86. The Zubin Foundation 小彬紀念基金會
87. Transgender Resource Center 跨性別資源中心
88. Union Church HK 香港佑寧堂
89. Union of Nepalese Domestic Workers in Hong Kong 香港尼泊爾家務勞動者工會

90. Umbrella Blossom 撐傘落區行動
91. Urban Refugees
92. Vidler & Co. Solicitors 韋智達律師行
93. Women Coalition of HKSAR 香港女同盟會
94. Women's Studies Research Centre HKU
95. 民生議政
96. 黃傘街頭基督徒基層團體

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