

Hearing of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's third report under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UN CAT)

Oral Statement to the Panel on Security, 11 June 2016

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I had hoped to speak today about our written submission to this session, which echo concerns made by the UN Committee against Torture. There is much to talk about - the Committee made several recommendations about the need for improved procedural fairness and transparency in the Unified Screening Mechanism. I myself went to Geneva and spoke to members of the Committee in March. And, as I speak this morning one of my colleagues is arriving in Geneva to speak with the OHCHR and UNHCR about this directly. I had hoped today to discuss this issues. I *had* hoped.

But, over the last few months, we have become increasingly concerned about the wave of inaccurate and irresponsible comments made about ethnic minorities and protection claimants in HK. Inaccurate terms have been used like: "bogus claimants", "illegal immigrants" and "fake refugees". Phrases like: "nuisance to society and "toxic tumours".

At Justice Centre we have heard from our client's how these kinds of comments are creating a climate of fear and hostility. And isn't just effecting those seeking asylum, but is fuelling racial discrimination in HK generally.

I'm sure you'll agree that the suffering of minorities and the most vulnerable social groups must *never* become a political bargaining chip. The poorest and most marginalised of

Hong Kong's society must never be set against each other. The politics of fear, diminish us all, with effects that outlive the election cycle, reverberating long afterwards.

Hong Kong is a dynamic international city. But we must never forget that fundamental to its success has always been its diversity and rule of law.

So when Hong Kong talks about withdrawing from UNCAT, a fundamental Human Rights Treaty; or when Hong Kong fails to fully implement the recommendations of the Committee Against Torture, it harms HK's reputation. It tarnishes the brand.

Look around you and you'll see a growing movement of citizens who are against this hostile rhetoric; and with no patience for bullying and scapegoating. I am proud that Justice Centre joined together with over 150 other organisations and prominent individuals to sign a statement to this effect.

We all want a Hong Kong that extends an open hand to those who have been persecuted, not closed minds and walled camps. We urge the administration to implement the UN CAT's recommendations in full, and to meet with Justice Centre and other concerned organisations to discuss improving the USM. It is time to work together. There is much work to be done.