

In response to the government's paper submitted to the Panel on Security in advance of their July 7, 2015 meeting to discuss the Unified Screening Mechanism, in which the government refers to refugees and asylum seekers as "illegal immigrants" and places emphasis on their "removal" rather than their protection, Victoria Wisniewski Otero, Advocacy Officer at Justice Centre Hong Kong said:

"The government is scaremongering. These figures are disingenuous and the rhetoric is dangerous. Many of these 'new' claims to which the government refers are likely to be old claims from the UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) system - refugees who had filed a UNCHR claim before the unified screening mechanism was implemented in March 2014, and had to 'enter' into the government system after the UNHCR stopped doing refugee status determination. Some of these claimants could have been here several years with a UNHCR claim prior to the start of the unified screening mechanism.

To call legitimate refugees seeking protection 'illegal immigrants' is also disingenuous and alarming. Since the introduction of the unified screening mechanism, the government forces refugees who come to Hong Kong on valid visas to overstay and become 'illegal' in order to even enter the system. The government's deliberate and misleading anti-refugee discourse is shameful and is feeding dangerous negative stereotyping and intolerance. The main objective of the USM should not be "removal", but rather protection to those fleeing from persecution and grave human rights abuses in their country of origin."

Justice Centre Hong Kong is an NGO that works to protect the rights of refugees and survivors of trafficking. www.justicecentre.org.hk.