

LETTERS FROM PROTECTION CLAIMANTS TO SWD ON THE IN-KIND FOOD ASSISTANCE IN THE EXISTING TENDER CONTRACT

Letter 1: Female protection claimant from East Africa

“Asylum seekers and refugees should be given free choice in food.”

On behalf of asylum seekers and refugees in Hong Kong, I would like to thank the Government of Hong Kong for the food provision given to us, although it is insufficient and needs improvement to satisfy our needs and to sustain our lives during our stay in Hong Kong. Asylum seekers and refugees should be given free choice in food according to their health requirements, interests, desires and to maintain a balanced diet.

The food distributed by the food store is the same every month and in every collection. They always have the same types of food in stock. However, it is not healthy to feed on the same kind of food all the time. You need different food for nutrition. Sometimes it causes sudden sickness in some individuals. The expense in treatment is high and at times the treatment is insufficient. Based on the above observation, I would suggest the following options:

1. To give individuals the monthly allowance in cash when s/he goes to sign the contract with the ISS. S/he can then go to places like markets, Welcome, supermarkets, PARK'n'SHOP.

OR

2. To give individuals the monthly allowance in coupon for s/he to go to different shops to buy different types of food and have freedom to choose.

Asylum seekers / refugees are vulnerable in the community and need necessities in their lives which do not hurt / harm them as human beings.

Letter 2: Young male protection claimant from Horn of Africa
“Food policy is humiliating and demeaning.”

Changing the food policy is very important for us, especially for me because it is really humiliating and demeaning.

It is very hard to collect food from the food store which is very far away from where I live. It would be nice and better, for me and for all of us, to collect food from the nearest supermarket. It would be convenient, we can save time and energy, and it would not be humiliating.

For the government, changing the system can also improve its image and save a huge amount of money. It is good for Hong Kong's economy.

Letter 3: male protection claimant from East Africa
“I have to walk 5 km every 10 days to collect my food.”

I have to walk 5 km every 10 days to collect my food. I get to the store not knowing what I am going to get. I am at the mercy of the store owner and the ISS caseworker who decides what I eat and at what frequency.

The food you get, especially meats, vegetables and fruits, is never fresh. The vendor buys them in bulk and stores them for a couple of days. Also, the brands of food we get from the appointed food vendors are different from what's available at the local supermarkets and shops. This raises concern as to the quality and safety of the food we consume. Are these foods subjected to the same quality controls on safety and hygiene?

I also do not have a choice on what to eat – the ISS chooses for me. The government wants to control the refugees through food and by manipulating our minds and body. They tend to want to control my thinking. It's humiliating and degrading to give someone food for ten days at once while you can give money and coupons to them to buy what they need and when they need.

Carrying the food is a challenge for those who have to walk to the food stores, as the transport allowance of HK\$200 is hardly enough for a whole month. By the time you reach home, the frozen meat has already thawed, you cannot store it for future consumption and have to cook and eat it within two days or so.

The refugee welfare system is full of bureaucracy and costs lots of money to operate and sustain. The money used in the current system could be used to improve the welfare of refugees. But the government seems oblivious to these issues. I therefore conclude that the Government of Hong Kong is not really keen on helping the refugees. It's a business, a huge business that runs into millions of shillings every month indeed. It is not meant to help anybody, if it does then the government should implement an efficient and effective system that will allow refugees to eat in dignity as normal human beings as per what the market out there can offer to the general public.

Letter 4: Female refugee mother from Central Africa **"Price and quality of food we receive is below the \$1,200 allowance."**

Hello, I am a female refugee. I am married and with children. I am addressing you this letter to make known the problems we have as a family with food policy for refugees and asylum seekers in HK.

1. At the ISS, we are allowed to select our own food. But sometimes they don't have the selected items in the stores. Even though we pick the items we want, the case worker would change the list for us if the food we pick goes beyond the allowance limit.
2. We collect the food every 10 days but the estimated price and quality of the food we receive is below the \$1,200 allowance. By comparing prices at the market, we estimate that the food provided by the ISS is only 66% of what we are supposed to get.
3. The distance for food collection is long and we live on the 6th floor in a building with no lift. It is very difficult to carry them up every 10 days.
4. The quality of some of the items is poor. Some items are nearly expired and the vegetable and meat are not fresh. The meats are very tough. No matter how long you cook them, they cannot be eaten.
5. Cases of sickness due to the poor quality of food: Vomiting, allergy, constipation, headache.
6. The amount of milk, juice, vegetable and meat given is not enough to feed my family for 10 days. We usually finish them with 5 days.

Therefore, we kindly ask you to review the system of food provision and give cash to refugees to let us buy the food we need. It will improve our health and eliminate all the problems we mentioned earlier in this letter.

We thank you for your understanding.

Letter 5: Male protection claimant from Horn of Africa

“We asylum seekers, as human beings, can manage our food budget.”

Dear Sir/Madam,

We kindly request you to see our issues on Hungry for Change. We asylum seekers, as human beings, can manage our food budget allocated by Hong Kong Government. We don't need the intermediaries to restrict us to eat what they want us to eat. So we strive for and advocate the government to change the food policy to a cash or coupon system. Then, we will be delighted and stop complaining about this issue. What are the mutual benefits for the asylum seekers and refugees and the Hong Kong Government if the system is changed?

1. It will create a good image for the Hong Kong Government. We will become healthy when we eat quality, unexpired, and enough amount of food. That will reduce government expenses on hospital services;
2. It cuts down intermediary cost, e.g. expenses on ISS food stores.