

Letterhead of Office of Emily Lau, Legislative Councillor

9 July 2001

By fax and by post

Mr. Victor Fung
Chairman
Airport Authority
1 Cheong Yip Road
Hong Kong International Airport
Lantau
Hong Kong

Dear Mr. Fung,

I am writing to express my grave concern at what happened in the Chek Lap Kok International Airport in the last few days. According to news media reports, thousands of people were stranded at the airport due to the effects of Typhoon Utor and industrial action by Cathay Pacific pilots.

Chek Lap Kok is a world class airport which has picked up a number of awards, and it is shocking to see it being plunged into chaos with some passengers describing it as "a refugee camp".

Last week scenes of chaos at the airport were flashed around the world. This could have a negative impact on the HKSAR's efforts to become a regional aviation hub. The many complaints and accusations from passengers and their relatives have tarnished Hong Kong's image.

Under section 5 of the Airport Authority Ordinance, the A.A. is responsible for operating the airport to achieve the objective of maintaining Hong Kong's status as a centre of international and regional aviation. This involves working closely and liaising with the airlines and all other partners at the airport. Thus the A.A. has a pivotal co-ordinating role to play, particularly during a crisis. Failure to do so is dereliction of duty.

While I appreciate the A.A. cannot be held responsible for the typhoon or the Cathay industrial dispute, I think the A.A. should have anticipated the outcome and put the staff on full alert. Unfortunately, the scenes of chaos betrayed a lack of crisis management.

Given the gravity of the matter and the wide public concern, I urge the A.A. to conduct an urgent investigation into the chaos and make recommendations on how to avoid such upheavals in future. This is important because Hong Kong is at the onset of the typhoon season and there is no end in sight to the Cathay industrial dispute.

In view of the inconvenience, aggravation and financial loss caused to thousands of passengers and their relatives, the A.A. board and senior management should apologize to the public over the fiasco. I would also like to have answers to the following questions:

1. Was an emergency centre set up throughout the period to deal with the crisis?
2. Was senior management closely involved in directing the staff?
3. Did senior management liaise closely with the airlines and other partners to ensure smooth and efficient operation of the airport?
4. Was additional staff deployed to deal with the crisis? If so, how many and when did they report on duty?
5. Are there manuals on crisis management and are drills being conducted regularly? When was the last drill held?
6. How much economic loss has the chaos caused to the A.A.?
7. Why were planes kept on the tarmac for hours, with passengers stuck in their seats?
8. Why were planes parked on the tarmac not moved to the perimeter of the airport to make room for other flights to take off and land?

- 9 Did the A.A. try its best to facilitate passengers getting up-to-date and accurate information from the airlines?
- 10 Were the toilets kept clean and well supplied?
- 11 Were the restaurants warned to stock up with food and drinks?
- 12 Were blankets supplied to passengers who were forced to spend the night at the airport?
- 13 Were sufficient police officers and security guards deployed to maintain order?

I urge the A.A. board to hold an urgent meeting to review the fiasco and set up a panel to investigate the problems. I also hope the Legislative Council Economic Services Panel will hold a special meeting to discuss this matter, hence I am copying this letter to the Chairman of the panel, the Hon. James Tien and to the Secretary for Economic Services, Ms Sandra Lee. I am also sending a copy of this letter to the Chief Executive, Mr. C.H. Tung, for his information.

Yours sincerely

Emily Lau