

**Views on Re-organisation of
the Social Welfare Department**

We support the Social Welfare Department's (the "SWD's") idea of re-organisation with the following reservations:

- (i) We are worried that with the re-organisation exercise cost being kept neutral, the SWD tends to upgrade the 13 District Social Work Officers (DSWOs) to Principal Social Work Officers (D1) by freezing the expansion of frontline social work staff. In the SWD, there are 1,288 Social Work Officer grade and 554 Social Work Assistant grade staff in place, a ratio of 2.32 officers : 1 assistant, which is rare among other government departments. This set-up will remain more or less the same after the re-organisation. Indeed, social work is a profession which stresses on frontline reaching-out work, or social workers' direct contacts with the public, especially the underprivileged. As mentioned in the CE's 2000 Policy Address, there is an imminent need to enhance outreaching services for those hard-to-reach target groups and to build up social networks to support the disadvantaged, i.e., the elderly, families and youths at risk, single families and new arrivals, etc, which are in critical needs for services. While strengthening district heads' capacity for greater responsibility/authority, the SWD had not bid for resource for addition of Social Work Assistant grade staff for the outreaching

team which is under the new Planning and Coordination Team.

- (ii) Our experience shows that the existing 5 Regional Offices do not follow SWD Headquarters' instructions on the excuse of flexibility. Very often, the Regional Office(s) ignore the agreement reached between the SWD Headquarters and our association as far as rules and orders are concerned. It is anticipated that the SWD central instructions would be further distorted and case handlings in a mess upon the creation of 13 Regional Office substitutes.

- (iii) In service settings where officer and assistant grades work in a mixed mode, e.g., family services, the two carry out same duties of equal responsibility. A telling point is found in the Medical Social Services setting where 15 Social Work Assistants cluster round the contagious diseases clinics while the non-contagious diseases units are bloated with 286 Assistant Social Work Officers, both performing as Medical Social Workers alike. In planning re-organisation, the SWD had neglected the factors of control of resource and cost effectiveness.

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