

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Protection of Press Freedom : The Police's Guidelines on Media Coverage

Purpose

This paper sets out the results of the discussion between the Police and the media about the setting up of designated press areas.

Background

2. At the meeting of the LegCo Panel on Home Affairs on 17 July 2002, the Chief Superintendent of the Police Public Relations Branch reaffirmed that the Hong Kong Police respect press freedom and attach great importance to maintaining a good working relationship with the press. The Police also undertook to enhance communication with the media on the setting up of designated press areas. On Members' request, the police and representatives of the media agreed to provide the Panel with a progress report on the results of their discussion about the guidelines on the setting up of designated press areas.

Results of Discussion

Enhanced Communication

3. The Police are fully aware that a cordial working relationship with the media can facilitate the effective dissemination of information on matters of public interest. Within the bounds of law, the Police are fully committed to enhancing their communications with the media and developing a constructive police-media working relationship.

4. Since the Home Affairs Panel meeting in July 2002, Police Public Relations Branch has met with representatives of the four journalists organisations, frontline journalists and news editors to discuss matters of mutual interest, including the guidelines on the setting up of designated press areas.

5. The Police have also taken the initiative to organise a series of forums where experienced journalists and news editors were invited to share their experience and insights with frontline police supervisors and other police officers. A total of eight such forums have been conducted since the Home Affairs Panel meeting in July 2002. They were attended by more than 1,000 police officers of various ranks.

6. Moreover, a video on police-media relations has been produced with the assistance of Hong Kong Journalists Association for use in force-wide training.

Review of Guidelines on the setting up of Designated Press Areas

7. Apart from enhancing communications with the media, the Police have also reviewed the guidelines on the setting up of designated press areas since the last Home Affairs Panel meeting. After due consultation with the media representatives, the guidelines were updated in December 2002.

8. Some of the major features of the revised guidelines are set out below:

- (a) Reflecting the concerns of the representatives of the media, it has been made explicit that the news media have the right to film, record or take photographs in or within the view of a public place;
- (b) If for operational reasons it is necessary to effect a temporary cordon, the officer-in-charge of the incident should consider setting up a press area whenever practicable to facilitate accredited members of the media; and
- (c) If designated press areas are included in pre-planned operations, the Police will seek to inform the press in advance as far as practicable to facilitate their planning of manpower deployment.

The Way Forward

9. With the support of the media, existing channels of communication between the Police and the media have been strengthened, in that most news

agencies have designated a liaison officer to facilitate communication with the Police Public Relations Branch on urgent matters if and when necessary. The Police will continue to seek ways to further improve communications with the media in order to strengthen mutual cooperation.

Hong Kong Police Force
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