

Extract from the minutes of the House Committee meeting on 12 November 2004

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VIII. Proposed subcommittee to study the subject of combating poverty

(Letter dated 8 November 2004 from Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung to the Chairman of the House Committee (LC Paper No. CB(2) 189/04-05(01))

32. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that poverty was a very serious problem. He and four other Members had proposed, at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services on 8 November 2004, that a subcommittee be formed under the Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Manpower. However, the Clerk had explained to members that the Rules of Procedure did not provide for two Panels to jointly appoint a subcommittee.

33. Dr CHEUNG further said that at the meeting on 8 November 2004, Mr James TIEN had commented that it was more appropriate for such a subcommittee to be formed under the House Committee, as the subject of combating poverty straddled the policy areas of other Panels, such as the Panel on Economic Services and Panel on Financial Affairs. Dr CHEUNG added that there were previous cases of subcommittees being formed by the House Committee to study specific subjects. He urged Members to support his proposal.

34. The Chairman said that a previous case was the Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice System formed in November 2003.

35. Dr YEUNG Sum said that Hong Kong ranked fifth in the country/area list of having the most serious income inequality problem. Poverty had become a very serious problem, despite Hong Kong's economic growth. He expressed support for Dr Fernando CHEUNG's proposal.

36. Dr YEUNG further said that the proposed subcommittee should be formed under the House Committee, so that all interested Members would be able to join the subcommittee. Dr YEUNG added that LegCo had passed a motion on 3 November 2004 which, among other things, urged the Government to set up a governmental inter-departmental committee on aiding the poor. A subcommittee should be formed under the House Committee to discuss the subject with the inter-departmental committee.

37. Mr Frederick FUNG said that he was one of the five Members who had originally proposed that a subcommittee be formed under the Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Manpower to study the subject of combating poverty. However, he agreed with Mr James TIEN that the subject straddled

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the policy areas of a number of Panels. He supported Dr Fernando CHEUNG's proposal for the subcommittee to be formed under the House Committee.

38. Mr James TIEN said that the disparity between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong warranted further study, but he did not agree with Dr YEUNG that the problem was very serious. Mr TIEN considered that the subject should be studied by a subcommittee under the House Committee, and not by joint Panel meetings.

39. Ms Margaret NG supported Dr Fernando CHEUNG's proposal. Ms NG said that a subcommittee was formed to study the juvenile justice system in the last term, as the subject straddled the policy areas of a number of Panels. Ms NG further said that there were many causes of poverty and they should be tackled from various policy perspectives. The formation of a subcommittee under the House Committee was the most effective and efficient approach to study the subject of combating poverty.

40. Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Chairman of the Panel on Welfare Services, said that in the last term, the Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Security held a number of joint meetings to discuss the problem of domestic violence. Members had to elect the Chairman of the joint meeting on each occasion. Subsequently, it was decided that a subcommittee be formed under the Panel on Welfare Services to follow up the issue, but non-Panel Members could not join the subcommittee. Miss CHAN further said that it would be more appropriate for the House Committee to form a subcommittee to discuss the subject of combating poverty, given that the subject straddled the policy areas of a number of Panels.

41. Dr KWOK Ka-ki supported Dr Fernando CHEUNG's proposal. Dr KWOK said that the formation of a subcommittee under the House Committee would enable interested Members to participate in the work of the subcommittee. It would also provide an appropriate forum for the relevant bureaux, and not just the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, to discuss the subject with Members.

42. The Chairman proposed that a subcommittee be formed under the House Committee to study the subject of combating poverty. Members agreed. The following Members agreed to join: Mr James TIEN, Mr Albert HO, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Mr Fred LI, Ms Margaret NG, Mrs Selina CHOW, Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Ms Emily LAU, Mr TAM Yiu-chung, Mr Frederick FUNG, Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Mr Alan LEONG, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, Dr KWOK Ka-ki, Dr Fernando CHEUNG, Mr Ronny TONG, Mr Albert CHENG and Mr KWONG Chi-kin.

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