

**Submission to the Panels on Welfare Services and Security
Hong Kong Christian Institute
July 18, 2006**

As a Christian organisation in Hong Kong, we are deeply concerned about the lives of asylum-seekers who are in our midst. We thus want to take this opportunity to offer our support for the welfare of asylum-seekers by proposing these changes to current government policy.

First of all, we believe that all asylum-seekers in Hong Kong should have the right to work. Most asylum-seekers come to our expensive city from impoverished countries in South Asia and Africa and oftentimes must wait two years or more until their cases are decided by the UNHCR or the torture tribunals of the Hong Kong government. Without any means of support, many of them are forced to become street sleepers and live in other undignified conditions. We thus ask that they have the right to work to have some means of support.

Even with this right granted by the Hong Kong government, however, many asylum-seekers still may live difficult lives as they may be unable to find a job due to a lack of the proper skills and/or the barrier of language. We thus ask the Hong Kong government to provide all asylum-seekers with welfare assistance to meet their basic needs, such as housing, food and transportation. With a humanitarian spirit, we, as a member of the international community, should express our compassion for those who have fled oppression in their country.

In light of this, Hong Kong should also sign and ratify the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees without any further delay. We often trumpet what an international city we are. Being an international city is not just about trade and investment, but it also has responsibilities to uphold values that bind us together as a global human family.

Lastly, we are strongly opposed to the policy of the Hong Kong government that detains asylum-seekers for overstaying their visa. We have been informed of asylum-seekers going to the Hong Kong Immigration Department to make a claim that they have been tortured in their home countries and then finding themselves in detention. Is this the way the Hong Kong government treats people who say they have been tortured? Is this Asia's world-class city? This is a policy that only brings shame to our community, and it is a shame if we, as a Christian NGO in Hong Kong, remain silent. We have chosen not to do so, and we ask the Hong Kong government to immediately reverse this shameful policy by no longer labelling them as "overstayers" but as asylum-seekers who are human beings.