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SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND MAINLAND AFFAIRS
GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT
LOWER ALBERT ROAD
HONG KONG

7 July 2008

The Honourable Margaret Ng
Chairman
Legislative Council Bills Committee
on the Race Discrimination Bill
Legislative Council Building
1 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

Dear Chairman,

Support measures for ethnic minorities and new arrivals

As we will be resuming the Second Reading Debate of the Race Discrimination Bill on 9 July 2008, I am writing to express my sincere gratitude to you and Members of the Bills Committee for your efforts in completing the deliberations of the Committee.

As we have explained in previous discussions, the Government is committed to combating racial discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for ethnic minorities. In this connection, we attach great importance to both legislation against racial discrimination and administrative support measures.

In parallel with the legislative exercise, therefore, we have been pursuing new measures to strengthen support services. These include, amongst other aspects, the various measures taken on the education front and on the provision of interpretation services for the use of public services, as well as our plan to establish four Regional Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities.

At the same time, although we do not consider it appropriate to arbitrarily define new arrivals from the Mainland as a distinct racial group, we are mindful of their needs and will continue to strengthen support services to facilitate their integration into the community.

With this as background, I am pleased to inform you and Members of the Bills Committee that we will introduce further enhancements to the related services, especially in regard to vocational training for the ethnic minorities and to services for new arrivals.

Vocational Training

In regard to vocational training for ethnic minorities –

- (a) the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) started providing dedicated placement-tied training courses for the ethnic minorities in mid-2007. A total of 80 training places were offered in the 2007-08. This figure will be increased to 2,000 in 2008-09 and, if necessary, the ERB is prepared to further increase the number of training places for the ethnic minorities to meet the demand. In addition to placement-tied courses, ERB also plans to introduce a job-searching integrated course for the ethnic minorities which is aimed at enhancing their understanding and knowledge of the local job market, workplace culture, and job searching channels and skills;
- (b) since the 2006-07 academic year, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) has organised dedicated courses for the ethnic minorities. To better meet the training needs of the ethnic minorities, the VTC has increased significantly the number of training places for ethnic minority students from 296 in 2006-07 to 625 places in 2007-08. In the light of experience and demand, this level will be maintained in 2008-09;

- (c) having regard to their training needs, both VTC and ERB will adopt flexibility in regard to the minimum class size for training courses which are dedicated for ethnic minority students. Although the normal class size for most VTC courses is 30, VTC is prepared to start a class for ethnic minorities where there are 15 to 20 students. Such flexibility is already exercised by the ERB. For instance, although the normal requirement is 15 - 25 students, ERB has given approval for a Local Domestic Helper course dedicated for the ethnic minorities to be conducted with only five trainees;
- (d) VTC will arrange interpretation service for the non-Chinese and non-English speaking ethnic minority learners as may be needed. Interpretation service will also be arranged for ERB courses where appropriate to facilitate teaching and learning. Furthermore, ERB plans to offer “interpretation training courses” in order to facilitate effective learning of the ethnic minorities and to promote their employment opportunities. Focus will be placed on techniques for interpreting English versus Hindi, and English versus Urdu. A total of 50 training places will be offered at the initial stage and more places will be offered subject to the outcome of the first batch of courses;
- (e) both VTC and ERB maintain close liaison with ethnic minority groups to help identify their training needs and to facilitate the design of training courses dedicated for ethnic minority students. To foster awareness of the training opportunities, VTC and ERB will step up publicity on the training courses for ethnic minorities and target it especially at the relevant ethnic communities; and
- (f) VTC has been organising sharing sessions for its instructing staff to promote their understanding of the culture and customs of ethnic minority students, so as to enhance their sensitivity and capability in providing assistance to these students. ERB is also organising

workshops to provide training on cultural sensitivity and customer services to its training bodies with a view to enhancing the training and employment support services for the ethnic minorities.

Support to New Arrivals from the Mainland

To reinforce the existing efforts, the Family Council will establish a Subcommittee to examine the service needs of new arrivals and to identify additional new measures for enhancement of services. At the same time, relevant Bureaux and Departments will introduce new initiatives to strengthen support services for them. These include –

- (a) on education, the Education Bureau will extend the initiation and induction programmes to cover new arrival students aged under 18;
- (b) on vocational training, ERB plans to introduce a pilot “Community Harmony Course” (CHC), which is an enhanced version of the current “Job Search Skills Course” in Tin Shui Wai. A youth version of the CHC will also be developed to cater to the training needs of young new arrivals; and
- (c) on welfare services, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) plans to seek additional resources to link up its hotline with those run by non-government organisations for new arrivals, so as to enhance the provision of information on welfare services as well as support for them. Those identified to be in need will be referred to related services for appropriate follow up action.

The Government will also continue to direct resources to priority districts with more pressing service needs, taking into account the distribution of new arrival population and other social factors (e.g. the number of battered spouse cases, low-income families, single parent families and unemployed parents). Examples include –

- (a) more targeted programmes for new arrivals, including mutual help groups, community education and family life education will be organized by SWD in these districts;
- (b) the Labour Department plans to organise more job fairs in the priority districts to assist new arrivals in seeking employment; and
- (c) ERB will provide more training places in part-time generic skills training courses in these districts to meet the needs of the new arrivals.

These new measures should demonstrate our continuing dedication to support for the needs of ethnic minorities and new arrivals, as well as our commitment to facilitate their integration into the community.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen

(Stephen Lam)

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs