

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

2007-08 Policy Agenda

INTRODUCTION

Since the re-organization of the Government Secretariat on 1 July this year, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB) has taken up the responsibilities for coordinating government policies on human rights and tasks relating to access to information. This paper briefs members on the initiatives of CMAB relating to human rights policies and protection of privacy set out in the 2007-08 Policy Agenda.

POLICY AGENDA

2. Under the guiding principle of “Investing for a Caring Society”, we will continue to implement two ongoing initiatives:

- (a) Continue our work on the promotion of human rights.
- (b) Continue to process the Race Discrimination Bill introduced in the Legislative Council in 2006.

3. The Government is committed to safeguarding human rights for people in Hong Kong and to promoting public understanding of and respect for these rights. CMAB has, following the re-organization of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007, taken up responsibility for co-ordination of government policies on human rights and generally for the promotion of human rights. We will continue the efforts made and to build on the existing foundation suitably.

4. Our main priority in the coming months is to continue to complement the relevant Bills Committee in its examination of the proposed Race Discrimination Bill. Since its establishment on 16 January 2007, the Bills Committee has had 11 meetings. It also held a public hearing on 3 March to receive views and depositions from members of the public. Various issues and questions have been raised regarding the scope of the Bill and its provisions. We will continue to listen to Members’ views and explain our proposals to the Bill Committee Members, in the hope that we can resume Second Reading of the Bill before the end of the current session of the Legislative Council.

5. Moreover, regarding protection against intrusion of privacy, we will use the proposals of the Law Reform Commission (LRC) on protection of privacy as a basis for in-depth discussions with all relevant stakeholders, including the Legislative Council (LegCo), the media and the general public. We hope that consensus can be reached on the balance between press freedom and protection of privacy so as to provide a basis for the Government to put forward concrete proposals to the LegCo for consideration. We are now working on the LRC Report on Stalking and will revert to the LegCo Home Affairs Panel once we have formulated the way forward.

6. In parallel with the activities of the Equal Opportunities Commission as well as those of other government bureaux and departments, we will continue to organise different publicity and public education programmes for promotion of human rights awareness in the community. These activities include poster campaigns, production of educational materials and conducting promotional talks at schools and other establishments.

7. We will also sponsor community projects to foster public participation in promotion of human rights. Funds have been earmarked in our 2007-08 budget for this purpose, including particularly allocations for disbursements through the Equal Opportunities (Race) Funding Scheme, the Children's Rights Education Funding Scheme, and the Equal Opportunities (Sexual Orientation) Funding Scheme.

8. We also attach importance to the provision of support services for the ethnic minorities so as to facilitate their early integration and to promote racial harmony within the community. A wide range of programmes and activities are undertaken and will continue. These include operation of a hotline for enquiries and complainants, talks and exhibitions, language classes, radio programmes, publication of service guidebooks in the different languages of the ethnic minorities as well as operation of community support teams for the ethnic minorities. Some of these programmes are run by community organizations with funds provided by the Government.

9. To facilitate exchange and mutual understanding, we maintain regular dialogue and communication with relevant community groups and human rights organizations. This will also be continued through regular meetings of established fora such as the Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony, the Human Rights Forum, the Ethnic Minorities Forum, the Children's Right Forum, and the Sexual Minorities Forum.

CONCLUSIONS

10. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau
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