

Submission on the Proposed Outline of the Topics to be Included in the Third Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

25th January, 2010

With regard to Article 15, 'Right to cultural life, scientific progress and its application', in the proposed outline of topics to be included in the third report of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) to the United Nations (UN) under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), I would like to suggest the Government of HKSAR as follows:

1. According to the Article 15 in the ICESCR, it states that the States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. Thus the HKSAR Government, as a State Party, is obliged to formulate and implement policies that would facilitate local scientific research and its application.
2. In the 2009-2010 Policy Address, it mentions that the HKSAR Government will allocate about \$200 million to launch the "R&D Cash Rebate Scheme", 'under which enterprises conducting applied R&D projects with the support of the Innovation and Technology Fund or in partnership with local designated research institutions will enjoy a cash rebate equivalent to 10% of their investments.' The scheme is so devised in the hope that it will 'inculcate a research culture among enterprises and encourage them to establish long-term partnerships with research institutions.'
3. I welcome the policy of establishing "R&D Cash Rebate Scheme" as stated in paragraph 2; however, I am also concerned with the utilization of the national key laboratories that were set up in Hong Kong by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China. In light of the policy of 'one country, two systems', these national key laboratories in Hong Kong are unable to receive funding from the Mainland authorities. Many fellow scientific researchers find it immensely difficult in running these laboratories. For this reason, Hong Kong Scientist Association has proposed the 'Closer Academic-research-and-development Partnership Arrangement (CAPA)' to the HKSAR Government, CPG and other relevant authorities, in the hope that the proposed policy would facilitate local scientific research and its application.

4. The lack of support from the HKSAR Government to certain scientific fields also hinders local scientific progress and its application. Comparing with fields such as electronics, information technology and communications, the research and its application in some fields, for instance, biotechnology and green technology, are not adequately supported. This especially leads to a limitation on the application of the scientific progress in these areas.

Also, the poverty situation in Hong Kong is a major subject of concern. To alleviate local poverty, the HKSAR Government shall adopt an official poverty line, concerning Article 11, for formulating a more effective policy and evaluating system.

1. In the concluding observations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Committee), the Committee reiterates its concern at ‘the continuing spread of poverty and lack of effective access to social services, which affects the disadvantaged and marginalized groups,’ and ‘is seriously concerned that under the existing social security system, and in particular under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), the levels of benefit are not sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living and that many low-income persons...are not covered by the scheme.’ This view of UN is further supported by Hong Kong’s Gini coefficient of 0.53, which is the highest among all Asian cities, according to UN-HABITAT.
2. During the discussion on the second report of the HKSAR, some members of the Panel on Home Affairs (the HA Panel) ‘considered it necessary for the Administration to devise a scientific method in collaboration with non-governmental organizations concerned for calculating the number of non-CSSA children who were living below the poverty line.’
3. In spite of the fact that there is no agreed universal definitions of poverty and the calculation of the intangible income might be difficult, as explained by the HKSAR Government, I basically agree with the Committee’s recommendation on adopting an official poverty line, ‘which would enable (HKSAR) to define the extent of poverty and to monitor and evaluate progress in alleviating poverty.’ Thus I hope the HKSAR Government would consider exploring the possibility of adopting an official poverty line to address Hong Kong’s worsening poverty situation.

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