

(Translation)

(Letterhead of the Tourist Guest Houses Federation of Hong Kong Limited)

Date: 16 October 1998
To: Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
From: The Tourist Guest Houses Federation of Hong Kong

Views on the Hotel Accommodation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 1998

We have studied the Hotel Accommodation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 1998. With regard to the Bill, we would like to set forth our views in four aspects in the hope that the Government will take heed of the matters raised and take actions as appropriate.

1. It has been a practice in recent years for many Mainland agencies based in Hong Kong to offer accommodation to staff members, guests and persons not on their staff. There are also cases where the whole building is used to receive incoming guests. With reception counters set up and operating just like guesthouses, such premises are however operated without a licence. Should premises of this kind, i.e. those receiving incoming guests but not in an open manner, be required to apply for a licence? We suggest that the Government should legislate in this respect to regulate such premises. Apart from the need to plug the legal loopholes, it is also essential for the Government to step up its efforts in enforcement and prosecution, otherwise the situation could never be improved.

On the issue of renting accommodation on a monthly basis, we propose that proprietors should not be allowed to lease out their premises on a monthly basis to guests who are tourists without Hong Kong identity cards.

2. We are in support of the Government's proposal that guesthouse licences should be renewed once every three years. However, does the three-year validity period apply to those guesthouses which are required to submit safety certificates issued by engineers every year? Should checks on guesthouses and safety certification continue to be done on an annual basis, it will surely be nothing but a nuisance to the public, and will bring additional burden to proprietors of the guesthouses concerned. We wonder if the Government could consider requiring the procedure of safety certification, together with the application for licence renewal, to be done

only once every three years.

3. Besides our wish for the remission of licensing fees, it is also our hope that the Government will pay attention to the operation of guesthouses not only in such areas as fire service, building safety and hygiene. As a matter of fact, the improper business practices of some guesthouses will also affect tourism of Hong Kong. Cases of tourists being cheated, detained or assaulted in such guesthouses are not uncommon and the police are short of means to tackle them. More often than not, the aggrieved guests could only leave the territory with their grievances not being redressed. This will in the long term tarnish the image of Hong Kong's tourist industry. Therefore, the Government should step up the monitoring of guesthouses found to have been involved in improper business practices and may even deny the issuance of a licence to such guesthouses, so that tourists will be protected from unfair treatment and the tourist industry will not be affected.
4. While the Government has caused repeated disruptions to the operation of licensed guesthouses, the unlicensed ones are left "trouble-free". Quite obviously, guests who have overstayed or committed illegal acts will only choose to stay in unauthorized guesthouses which are not subject to police checks or in private premises.