

WE NEED AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS TO REDRESS RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

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Movement Against Discrimination

Introduction

Prejudice and discrimination on the ground of race has been ignored and undermined in Hong Kong. The SAR Government does not recognize this as a problem, while many of the people, primarily those belong to the mainstream, are either indifferent or ignorant about this. There are also some people who do have a discriminating attitude. Cases and issues that we have gathered from different sources suggested that this is one of the social problems that we need affirmative actions in due course. Members of the Movement Against Discrimination have been advocating a legislation be enacted to redress this problem in long run, as we had in the past, responding to similar needs related to the disabled and other social groups.

Prejudice and Discrimination

Racial prejudice is an attitude directed in a negative and often stereotypic terms. It is also an inter-group phenomenon in a society having one group of people consider themselves more superior than the other group. Not only this. This so-called superior group may very often try to exclude rising groups from full participation in the society. They may at times tend to displace their anger and frustration on minority groups; exploit them by labeling and stigmatizing them, denying their basic rights and essential services. That is how the majority maintains their status as the mainstream and superiority and they tend to rationalize their attitude by continuous victimizing.

Such inter-group phenomenon will become a kind of discrimination when actual, overt behavior or actions are taken place to structure the major systems of the society so that it can be deliberately manipulated to the disadvantage of some ethnic groups by the clever, by the vicious and the powerful. This may unfortunately reinforced by the indifference, apathy, inaction and inertia of the average people of the majority. The minority groups are quite naturally being marginalized, segregated and neglected by the society as a whole and then absorbed into their own subcultures, haunted by a sense of powerlessness and identity crisis, seemingly without a way out.

The Hong Kong Context

The general conditions here and now in Hong Kong, in our opinion, are not favorable to ethnic minorities and even those new arrivals from Mainland China. Other than the super size of the mainstream of Chinese people or the homogenization of the society, the conservatism of the middle class conformists, the authoritarian leadership of the SAR Government, the relative political apathy of the people in Hong Kong, not to mention the unemployment problem, the worsening of the economy and quality of life give no positive help to our campaign against racial discrimination, or even any similar efforts for equal opportunities. Rather, all these furnish some people with a discriminating attitude, excuses to convince the government to take no action at all. Moreover, it also creates intra-group conflicts of the minorities; accentuates the tendencies toward self-hatred, self-absorption, withdrawal, and identity crises in some individuals.

We have acknowledged also specific problems that ethnic groups have encountered and these problems deserve much more concern.

We observed that the children of both ethnic Indian and Pakistani communities have difficulties in securing school placements. Some schools do not welcome these students at all. A few schools do accept children from these two groups but they have to wait for a long period of time before getting admitted. Similarly, new arrivals from Mainland China also have the same problems. It looks like that the Education Department has not tried its best to coordinate and make all the necessary arrangements. Even when these children are admitted, so special efforts had been made to help them integrate with the larger group and to catch up with the general academic progress.

Members of the ethnic minorities, for example, the Nepalese, have to receive a lower wage on similar jobs in the open market. Although they are permanent residents in Hong Kong, their employment conditions are much lower than the average people in Hong Kong with the same or even lower qualifications.

Domestic helpers from different Asian countries have raised similar issues in terms of employment. Many of them have to take up additional works; including those clearly not related to domestic needs within the households. At times, they are subject to abuse. When they are dismissed unfairly, they cannot have enough time to

process law suits or negotiations due to the two-week rule.

Perhaps the most difficult part is the use of public services. Members of the ethnic minorities have brought up issues related to the bad attitude of civil servants or officers handling public services that they consume every now and then. Female tourists from a number of Asian countries had been called or hinted prostitutes at the custom services. Police officers, as well as other helping professionals engaged in public service, have very poor attitude on members of different ethnic minorities.

Nevertheless, when the Home Affairs Bureau wants to study the racial issues in Hong Kong, very few members of the minority groups had actually been consulted. Thus, the final conclusion of the Bureau will naturally be something different from the true picture of the problem.

To redress these problems, efforts should be directed toward the enactment of an ordinance against racial discrimination and the empowerment of the minorities. Some may suggest to educate the public and to change people's attitudes instead. We certainly would not go against any efforts to enhance positive attitudes but we need more, here and now, a clear and precise minimum standard of behavior so that any average people in the street of Hong Kong what should be done and what should not be done. Education takes time and resources; easily targets the wrong populations at most of the time. Activities of this sort very often, imply style over substance, and probably are used by the government as the means to avoid something more decisive.

Conclusion

In short, we need affirmative actions to redress racial discrimination on Hong Kong. More specifically, we need a Racial Discrimination Ordinance, so as to set up a minimum standard of behavior in resolving racial prejudice and discrimination in this society, We also need more resources and efforts be invested on campaigns and social policies for the creation of a new society with genuine equality for all.