

董建華
中華人民共和國香港特別行政區
行政長官



C. H. TUNG
Chief Executive
The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
of the People's Republic of China

28 June 2003

The Honourable Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye
Chairman
Legislative Council House Committee
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road, Central
Hong Kong

Dear Selina,

Thank you for your letter of 9 June 2003.

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a new disease. There remains a lot the world does not know about it. The epidemic has dealt a severe blow to Hong Kong. Through the public health measures taken by the Government, the selfless devotion and commitment of our fine team of healthcare workers, and the support and cooperation of the community, we have successfully brought the epidemic under control. The lifting of the travel advisories by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other countries and the subsequent removal of Hong Kong as a SARS affected area by the WHO is a testimony and reinforcement of international confidence in the measures and actions taken by Hong Kong to control the spread of the disease.

As you have pointed out in your letter, there is a risk of a recurrence of the disease and some experts have predicted that this may happen as early as next winter or spring. We must remain vigilant and must constantly remind the community not to let down our guard. Our first priority is to protect public health, and the most important thing we must do now is to

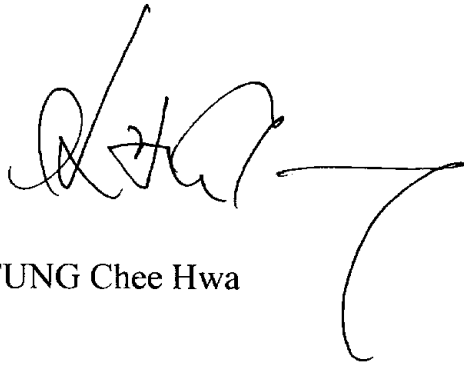
see as soon as possible what lessons we have learned or can be learned in the three months of our effort to fight the SARS epidemic, so that we are better prepared to respond to another possible outbreak of SARS, or other infectious diseases, should it occur.

The SARS Expert Committee appointed to investigate into the SARS epidemic, comprising some of the world's most experienced and knowledgeable medical experts in the fields of public health, epidemiology, disease control and hospital management, is best placed and equipped to undertake this review. Hong Kong is fortunate, and indeed honoured, to be able to assemble such a distinguished panel of international experts to assist us in undertaking the review, and we must make the best of use of their expertise to help us improve the capability and preparedness of our public health system to cope with the outbreak of infectious diseases.

The objective of the review is to carry out a detailed and professional study into the outbreak; to review the way we managed and controlled the epidemic; to examine and review the capabilities and structure of the health system and the operations of the Hospital Authority and the Department of Health in the prevention and management of infectious diseases such as SARS; and to make recommendation on areas of improvement so that we can learn from experience and do better next time round should the virus come to attack us again in winter. Two groups have been formed under the Committee to look at hospital management and administration, and public health issues, respectively. To underline the objectivity of the review, Sir Cyril Chantler, a member of the Committee, has been appointed to lead the group on hospital management and administration; and another member, Professor Sian Griffiths, has been appointed to lead the group on public health. They will oversee information gathering and fact-finding of related issues of the respective groups and lead the discussions.

The work of the Committee is of great urgency and vital importance to protecting the public health and safety of Hong Kong. I urge Members and the community to give their best support and cooperation to the Committee in conducting the review. Our aim is to complete the review in September, so that it will still leave us with sufficient time to implement the recommendations and gear up our public health system before the onset of winter. The Government is committed to publishing the report of the Committee and keeping the public fully informed of its findings and recommendations. I hope Members will give the Committee a chance to complete its report before drawing any conclusion on what follow-up action is necessary.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tung Chee Hwa', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

TUNG Chee Hwa