

Hong Kong Church Leaders' Statement on Race Discrimination Legislation

We welcome the introduction of legislation to render discrimination, harassment and vilification, on the ground of race, unlawful. The Christian Church, "which heralds the message of love, the Christian Gospel, categorically condemns racism, xenophobia, and all forms of related intolerance as destructive to the vision of peace which God desires and which human beings, organizations of goodwill, and above all the Church, aim to promote." (His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Statement for the UN Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, 2001). We hold that "racism is a sin because it separates us from God and our fellow human beings making us blind to the reality of people's suffering... Racism is a sin because it is a blatant denial of the Christian Faith and incompatible with the Gospel... Racism is primarily a sin because it destroys the very source of humanity – the image of God in humankind." (World Council of Churches, Central Committee, 2002)

We welcome the Government's intention to introduce legislation against racial discrimination in fulfillment of Hong Kong's international obligations. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was extended to Hong Kong in 1969 and continues to apply to the Hong Kong SAR. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the UN Human Rights Committee, and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, all have maintained that the Convention obliges signatories to introduce specific legislation and have repeatedly urged the Hong Kong government to take action.

The Race Discrimination Bill is undoubtedly a step forward, but its limited scope (excluding many government acts from its coverage) will leave a number of problems unsolved. Apart from hoping that meaningful improvements will be made to the Bill, we are particularly concerned with the areas of education and translation services offered by government departments. Resources must be made available to overcome discrimination in these two areas.

We urge the government to continue improving the teaching of Chinese to ethnic minority students, so that they can become as proficient as possible. Knowledge of the language is essential to advance integration, to further vocational training and higher learning, and to help youth belonging to ethnic minorities to pursue a career.

The provision of translation in government services is essential to make them accessible to members of ethnic minorities. Job openings advertised by the Labour Department and notices issued by the Housing Department should also be in English. There needs to be improvements in translation services for ethnic minority languages in the medical services.

Today is Human Rights Day, we call on all parts of our community to combat racial discrimination in our midst:

- **on the government to live up to its obligation under UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.**
- **on the churches to raise the awareness of racial discrimination among their members and to sharpen their consciences of racism as sin.**
- **on all citizens to refrain from acts and words discriminating against people from other races.**

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