

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2007

***Dear Bill Committee Members and Government Officials:***

*As a local social service organization which concern the welfare of the ethnic minority communities, Hong Kong Christian Service together with numerous minorities service users are pleased to see that the awaited Race Discrimination Bill had been tabled in the LegCo on 13<sup>th</sup> December last year. Nevertheless, we are much regretful to see that the bill fails in protecting local ethnic minorities from probable indirect discrimination due to language barrier.*

*Language barrier is without doubt the major impediment that hinders nearly all aspects of life of the local ethnic minorities. Inability in mastering local languages especially Chinese limits their access to necessary and essential services that help in easing their problems.*

*Though it was mentioned on the bill that the Government "appreciates the difficulties which are at times faced by some ethnic minorities who do not use Chinese", Clause 58 of the bill gives exemption for both public and private sectors "for use, or failure to use, particular languages in regard to provision of goods, services and facilities, etc." Understandably, the private sector especially those in small businesses may not be practicable to conduct their businesses in diverse languages or provide translation support to their customers. Nevertheless, it is unquestionably that the Government sector has the obligation to guard people against deprivation of right to welfare. Hence, the public sector has no excuse but acting in proactive minority-oriented approach to ensure needy local ethnic minorities accessible to all public sector services. Clause 58 is without any doubt gives no hand on protecting ethnic minorities' right to welfare but helps in prolonging the deprivation suffered by the minorities.*

*In the meantime, Clause 20(2) and 26(2) exempt education and training institutes from not modifying their medium of instruction in order to cater students of any racial group that imply no affirmative measure needs to be done in addressing the language problems suffered by thousands of ethnic minority children. With regard to limited language support to ethnic minority students in acquiring local languages that would facilitate them in getting better chance of further study and decent careers, these exemptions are absolutely unfavorable to the minority children as well as disadvantaging them from generation to generation.*

*Concerning the long-term development and settlement of the ethnic minorities so as to facilitate them in contributing their strengths in building an integrated and prosperous Hong Kong, language proficiencies is evidently an issue that worthy to put on the top of the Government agenda. Though we agree that solely legislation may not bring racial equality and harmony, we think that enacting an*

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*effective Race Discrimination Bill should be a prior and vital step.”*

*Hence, we hope that Government could step on the feet of the ethnic minorities and reevaluate how language barrier deprived them from equal opportunity.*

***WE urged the Government to take instant measures:***

- 1. To reevaluate the consequences of the language barrier on the ethnic minority community***
- 2. To repeal the exemptions on Clause 58, 20(2) and 26(2) immediately, otherwise the Government's intention in defending racial equity will be in vain.***

*Yours faithfully,*

***Hong Kong Christian Service***