

民政事務總署
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By Fax & By Post

1 April 2010

Ms Betty Fong
Clerk to Panel
LegCo Panel on Home Affairs
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road, Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Fong,

Panel on Home Affairs
Female participation in Village Representative Elections

When the Panel on Home Affairs was consulted on the proposed amendments to the Village Representative Election Ordinance (Cap. 576) on 14 November 2008, a Member expressed concern about female participation in Village Representative (VR) elections and requested the Administration to report on the measures to encourage female participation in VR elections. The relevant extract of the notes of the Panel meeting is enclosed (Annex).

VR elections in the past

Since the enactment of Cap. 576 in February 2003, two village ordinary elections were held in 2003 and 2007 respectively. For 707 existing villages, there were a total of 1,480 VR seats. The number of registered voters amounted to about 158,000 in 2003 and 170,000 in 2007, and about half of them (47 %) were female. The number of candidates was 1,638 in 2003 and 1,630 in 2007. The number of female candidates was 29 in 2003, and it rose to 35 in 2007, representing an increase of 21%. A total of 1,291 VRs were elected in 2003, and 1,320 in 2007. The

number of female VRs elected rose from 17 in 2003 to 28 in 2007, representing an increase of 65%.

The elections mentioned above are underpinned by Cap. 576 which offers equal opportunities for both genders. Both men and women can participate in VR elections as voters and/or candidates in so far as they fulfill the criteria as prescribed in the Cap. 576¹.

VR election in 2011

The next village ordinary election will be held in 2011. For 709 existing villages, there are a total of 1,484 VR seats. The number of eligible voters as recorded in the 2009 Final Voter Register is 169,740. Amongst these voters, 80,005 or 47 % are female.

The Home Affairs Department (HAD) will conduct a publicity campaign from the end of May 2010 to around mid-July 2010 to encourage eligible persons of both genders to register as voters. It will set up a dedicated VR election website and advertise on newspapers, television and radio. HAD, through its District Offices, will also display banners, posters and notices at villages in the New Territories, and distribute voter registration forms and leaflets. It will also appeal to villagers to register as voters and participate in the election through mobile broadcast on vehicles.

In addition to the above, HAD and its District Offices will issue appeal letters to rural committees and women groups in the New Territories to encourage female participation in the VR election. Before the nomination for the election, HAD will issue an appeal letter to the Heung Yee Kuk to highlight the importance of equal opportunities for both genders. We also plan to advertise on television in hours that may attract more female viewers.

¹ To be eligible for registration as a voter for an existing village, a person needs to be an adult, a Hong Kong permanent resident and a resident of that village for three years immediately before the date of the application for registration. To be eligible for nomination as a candidate, a person needs to attain the age of 21 and has been a resident of that village for six years before the nomination, and is not disqualified from voting in the election.

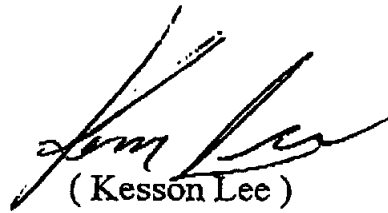
To be eligible for registration as a voter for an indigenous village or a composite indigenous village, a person needs to be an adult and an indigenous inhabitant of that village, or a spouse or surviving spouse of an indigenous inhabitant of that village, and holds an identity document. To be eligible for nomination as a candidate, a person needs to attain the age of 21 and should be an indigenous inhabitant. He or she should also be a Hong Kong permanent resident and ordinarily resides in Hong Kong, and is not disqualified from voting in the election.

Way Forward

We will continue to step up publicity to encourage a wider participation of women in VR elections. We will also closely monitor the rate of female participation in the coming voter registration, candidate nomination and voter turn-out, as well as the number of female VRs elected. As an on-going effort, we will encourage a wider participation by women in rural affairs, e.g. through the establishment of women groups to promote volunteer work and mutual help in rural areas.

Should Members of the Panel request any clarifications or further information, please contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kesson Lee', written in a cursive style.

(Kesson Lee)

for Director of Home Affairs

Annex

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Action

Extract from Panel on Home Affairs
Minutes of Meeting held on Friday, 14 Nov 2008
at 8:30 a.m. in the Chamber of the Legislative
Council Building

Female participation in VR elections

37. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about female participation in VR elections and asked about the number of female candidates and electors, the number of female VRs elected, and whether there was any complaint in which female voters were being threatened or pressurised to vote for particular candidates in these elections.

38. USHA responded that 47% of the electors of VR elections were female. Out of a total of 1630 candidates of VR elections in 2007, 35 were female; and out of a total of 1480 VR seats, 28 were filled by female. There were six reports of intimidation cases and none of them was lodged by female voters complaining about being threatened or pressurized during the elections.

39. Considering that VREO was enacted partly to ensure that electoral arrangements would uphold equality between the two sexes and in view of the unsatisfactory female participation in VR elections since 2003, Ms Emily LAU suggested that the Administration should study the reasons for the relatively low participation rate of female in VR elections and step up its effort to encourage higher female participation in the forthcoming VR elections. She requested and the Administration undertook to provide a paper to report on the measures taken by the Administration in this regard.

Admin

40. USHA said that although 47% of the electors were female, the number of female candidates and elected VRs were considered low. As only two village ordinary elections had been held since the enactment of VREO in 2003, she hoped that there would be a rise in female participation in the future VR elections.

V. Any other business

41. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 9:45 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 December 2008

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