

Submission from Mr Thomas FRANZ

I come here today confused. We live in what is arguably the most developed and international city in Asia. We claim the title of "Asia's World City". More than 90% of us in this very room are either ourselves migrants or only have to look back two or three generations in our families to find either migrants or refugees. This city was built on the labor and ingenuity of migrants seeking a better life and refugees seeking a safe place to live and thrive. With this history, and our desire to paint ourselves as developed, why do we attack people today who have the exact same story? Why do we attack those who are coming here to seek safety?

This subcommittee on Issues Relating to the USM has come up with several suggestions. All of these suggestions are either to speed up the process of removing those seeking protection or are outright attacks on those seeking protection. The entire report paints a picture of criminals who are seeking to take advantage of poor Hong Kong. There are literally no suggestions on how to improve the system to actually help those who really need help.

A question that apparently did not come up is why is an organization who has an often stated goal of not granting refugee status to anyone in charge of the process to substantiate claims? This seems to me to be like putting the fox in charge of the hen house. A suggestion might be to find a department or organization dedicated to granting protection to those who truly need it. In my work with non-refoulement claimants I have met many who have genuine cases. In several different incidents, people have sought substantiation here for years before finally being rejected. While, in one case, a family member with the exact same story went to New Zealand and was fully recognized in less than three months. A second family was here, same process, rejected after 3 long years, but they found a way to get to the US on a tourist visa. They placed their claim and in under four months were accepted. The mother is now working and benefiting the economy and society in the US. While here, we say that our pitiful substantiation rate simply shows that all claimants are "fake".

I am here to ask that common sense be used. Install a system run by people whose goal is not to refuse protection to everyone, but to identify those who need protection and protect them. Stop using the language of fear. Let's wake up to the strength that is in diversity. Hong Kong's diverse background and history is what made us a leader in Asia. Recognize this, encourage this. Use subcommittees like this to actually help people and not to just spread fear and make political points. The potential to strengthen Hong Kong that is in the very people that are being vilified is right in front of you. As Asia's World City, let's actually live like we deserve to be leaders.