

Greetings of Peace.

The United Muslim Association of Hong Kong was established in 1997 as a charitable institution and operates the UMAH International Primary School in Yuen Long and a home for the elderly, Haji Omar Ramju Sadick Care and Attention Home in Tuen Mun in the New Territories. We are also currently in the process of constructing the Sheung Shui Masjid (Islamic centre) & elderly home project.

To give a brief background, a plot of land (2,046 Sq. meters) was acquired in Sheng Shui in 2006 with a lease premium of HK\$9.35 Million to construct an Islamic Centre and a 200-bed elderly care home. This was after more than a decade long struggle by the late Haji Ali Din, the founder of UMAH and after resolving the concerns of the local resident community in that area. Through the generous grant of the Qatar endowment fund, the land premium was paid.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed with the Ministry of Finance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 30 September 2009 after the late King Abdullah pledged to finance the construction project. According to the Agreement Memorandum, the project was to be named as 'King Abdullah Islamic Centre and elderly home'.

Moreover, in order to efficiently supervise the Sheung Shui Masjid Project, in 2013 another Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed according to which the 'The Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong' (BOT) was entrusted the project pending the outcome of the litigation by unauthorized parties claiming leadership of the organization. Since then, BOT has contributed to keep the project alive by lending more than One Million Hong Kong Dollars (HK\$1 Million) for penalty land premium to the Lands Department to maintain the lease of this precious land, as we were given 5 years to build and it was already due in 2011.

In July 2016, the Saudi Consulate in Hong Kong sent a letter to the government of HKSAR declaring their wish to postpone the project for some time. This was after 2 tendering exercises in the previous years, after the Buildings Department (BD) had already approved the design after long consultations with the Social Welfare Department (SWD). However, now, the Lands Department of the HKSAR is not prepared to further extend the land lease without concrete evidence of pursuing actual construction. In light of this situation, the HKSAR government may re-enter this land lot.

We have approached various institutions, one of which is the The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust which maybe interested to fund the elderly home pending our funding for the Masjid part.

I would like to raise the following points:

1. With regards to the lot, why are we required to ensure building an elderly home when other religious groups in the North District with monasteries and churches were granted land without such a requirement? (1)

Furthermore, why are we required to build from our own meager resources?

According to the Chief Executive's Policy Address, the HKSAR government plans to :

“Set up a \$1 billion Fund to promote gerontechnology and subsidise elderly service units to trial use and procure technology products.” (2)

In this regard we would like to request the HK SAR government to consider allocating resources to assist us in building the elderly centre. Furthermore we would like to request including a healthy ageing concept that incorporates youth and community involvement in our project.

2. Why is information on grants in the Social Welfare Department(SWD) available only in Chinese? (3)
Likewise most ethnic minorities are unable to consider a career in this field due to the language requirement.

In this regard we would like to request the SWD to have all its information in English to allow us to apply.

We also request the SWD or request the training institutes to consider relaxing language requirements so that more ethnic minorities can train to serve the community as social workers or health care workers.

3. Why did we have to pay such a high premium and granting of land delayed for so long that our founder passed away before seeing his dream realized (setting in motion this unfortunate chain of events at present)

Our late Chairman had pointed out previously that the “regrant premium” (a specific type of land lease for charitable and non-profit making organizations) for the headquarters of Heung Yee Kuk (Rural Council) was only HK\$1,000 (Legislative Council, 6 December 2001, 1776– 1777), even though some of its facilities such as the theatre, exhibition hall, and conference room can be hired by the public and Heung Yee Kuk makes a profit from such activities. Legislative Council minutes also show that in 2006 the government required an elderly home in nearby Sai Kung Lung Ha Wan to pay a premium of only HKD\$1,000 (Legislative Council, 6 December 2001, 1776 –1777)(4). The varying prices across similar applications is evidence of government prejudice.

We respectfully request this subcommittee to review our project and convey our urgent plea to the HKSAR government to provide assistance for us to realize our decades long dream of providing not only a place of worship but also a range of community services for our youth as well as the elderly.

Hong Kong is our home, help us to make it a viable home for our community.

References

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3. https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_elderly/sub_csselderly/id_opportunit/

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