

# REFUGEE UNION

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To: International Social Services – Hong Kong Branch

## **Ref. against ISS-HK manipulation of food prices**

We are the Refugee Union, an association of refugees that represents nationals of many countries seeking asylum in Hong Kong. Our stated mission is to seek justice and protection, fighting for our rights, dignity and future when these are not clearly provided as per international and domestic legal frameworks.

We are calling for a stop to the exploitation of refugees by International Social Service (“ISS-HK”), in particular through the manipulation of food supplies as currently implemented without prices.

We are calling for an end to unfair ISS-HK practices that for years have reduced the real value of the food we collect from 1,060\$, as indicated by the government, to 600 – 700\$, as distributed to us.

We are refugees who rely entirely on government assistance to meet ours and our family’s material needs. We are not allowed to work. We are punished by 15 – 22 months imprisonment if convicted for taking up employment to make ends meet, which includes purchasing essential food supplies.

It is a disgrace that 360 to 460\$ are allegedly stolen from each emergency ration every month with no explanation provided. The total value of such widespread, relentless thievery give us reason for concern and obviously less food to eat, while also placing the authorities before some unreasonable and possibly criminal practices. Estimating a low average of 4000 ISS service users over the past 10 years, the extent of the pilfering is as follows:

- **360\$** stolen from one service user a month
- 1,440,000\$ stolen from 4000 service users a month
- 17,280,000\$ stolen from 4000 service users a year
- **172,800,000\$** stolen from 4000 service users in 10 years

If only 21\$ were stolen from each collection, it would still amount to a million dollars a year devoured by the *snakes* that slither along the supply chain between SWD cash payments and ISS-HK deliveries!

We are refugees who ought to be protected and assisted by the government and its contractors until our claims are definitively evaluated. The media has reported shameful abuses by ISS-HK across the board: refugee slums, misleading contracts, fake residential addresses, bogus rental payments, arbitrary service denial and substandard food. Such blatant mistreatment appears to reach a new criminal height in the corrupt distribution of food supplies through ISS-HK’s seven dedicated shops.

## **We requests the immediate introduction of itemized prices to ISS food collection forms.**

In light of the food value increase this month (from 1,060\$ to 1200\$), it is vitally important that we, the end users of such services, are informed and allowed to make informed decisions on what is available, at what price and in what quantity. Only this can stop the apparent cheating and collusion.

It is unreasonable that ISS case workers strike out many of our food selections warning, “*No, It is over your budget!*” when we are left entirely in the dark with regard to itemized prices on the food lists.

We appreciate the welfare assistance offered by Hong Kong Government, and its generous citizens. The problem lies entirely with ISS-HK who seem to be cheating us out of hundreds of dollars every month right under the authorities’ nose. Today we unite to protest against this cheating.

**Refugee Union**