

3 March 2015

Fire Services Headquarters1 Hong Chong Road,
Tsim Sha Tsui East
Kowloon**Attention: Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Mr. Joseph Leung**

Dear Mr. Leung –

Severe fire hazard in refugee slums

Following contact by your department on 2 March 2015, Vision First draws your attention to severe fire hazards present in numerous refugee slums as reported to the Fire Services Department on several occasions in the past two years. The type of compound, nature of unauthorized structures and violations of fire safety rules are readily identifiable in the [photographs posted on our website](#).

In particular, we call attention to [our letter dated 4 November 2013](#) that stated among other issues:

“... we are concerned that such changes – including apparent illegal structures – violate the Fire Service Ordinance (Cap 95), and thus expose refugees to a significant fire hazard.”

“... there is an imminent danger of explosion where LPG cylinders are stored carelessly, in volume and often in direct sunlight. We are deeply concerned that no Notifiable Gas Installation license is obtained where more than 130 liters of liquefied petroleum gas are being stored. The evidence suggests that many owners of refugee ghettos are in breach of the Gas Safety (Gas Supply) Regulation, Reg 6.”

“... portable fire extinguishers are a fire service installation (FSI). Pursuant to Regulation 8 of the Fire Service (Installations and Equipment) Regulations, Cap 95B, a person who fails to inspect fire extinguishers may be liable upon conviction. In several slums, fire extinguishers were either not installed or provided by landlords with inspection dates having lapsed by over a year.”

On 29 January 2015 a blaze ripped through one of the above-mentioned slums tragically killing a refugee and causing considerable property loss. Your department dispatched 18 trucks and over 50 firemen to extinguish a powerful fire that risked spreading to adjoining illegal structures.

On 25 February 2015 a blaze incinerated another of the above-mentioned slums, fortunately with no fatalities despite [several gas cylinders exploding spectacularly](#). Your department dispatched 35 trucks and 165 firemen to bring this second fire under control. [Many dangerous gas cylinders were removed](#) and appear to have been scorched by flames posing a severe threat to your personnel.

The proverb “Never Two Without Three” comes to mind and raises grave concerns about potential loss of life in slums where unregulated, poorly installed gas cylinders are connected to damaged stoves retrieved from garbage dumps by impoverished refugees who cannot afford better appliances.

It is our understanding that it would be in the best interest of your department and refugee tenants in such slums areas that the Fire Service Department identify and prevent fire hazards with the aim of protecting life and property.

We look forward to collaborating with your department’s contingency plans to address fire risks.

Sincerely yours,

Cosmo Beatson

Cosmo Beatson
Executive Director