

Real, fake refugees?

Part 1

Nowadays, there are 100,000 people that are making a claim for non-refoulement protection in Hong Kong, but Immigration Department said that there are some ppl are abusing the system. Legislative Council Member, Elizabeth Quat, said that if the ppl claim they are facing dangers, HK Government should give them subsidy for life. But also there are asylum seeker insists that they are actually facing dangers, not fake refugees.

Number of cases which are waiting for approve reaches 10,000 amount, but the percentage that passes the application is only 0.3%. A tunnel near Happy Valley had a fire in one morning, Singh (fake name)'s property all has been destroyed. He came to HK 1.5 years ago, he did not leave HK after 14 days. Immigration Department gave him temporary ID card after arresting him. Sabir who is also an asylum seeker tried to help Singh to contact organization but no response. Singh said ISS haven't offer any help for him, and the Government also no action, "They really not care about us."

Sabir Immigration Department's staffs pointed on a map, told him which place in his country that he can live. But actually he can't live there peacefully because of religious conflict. Immigration Department said they will not comment specifically on Sabir's case, they emphasizes there are many training courses provided to asylum seekers in order to let them know every case clearly.

Apart from that, Immigration Departing criticized that there are asylum seekers abusing the system, about 70% asylum seekers apply claims for non-refoulement protection after being arrested. Legislative Council Member, Elizabeth Quat, said the situation should not be ignored. She quoted the data which only 3% claims are recognized finally, large amount of them finally were proved they were not refugees.

Cosmo Beatson, CEO of Vision First, asked why Government can recognize asylum seekers are fake in only one week. He thought the Government labeled them, Government labeled the cases as fake before they gave a chance to asylum seekers to state their claims. He thought the cases that rejected by HK Government, not represent that they were fake, only can said that the standard set by HK Government was too high.

However, Legislative Council Member, Elizabeth Quat, said many new asylum seekers came to HK were coming form India, but there were no wars in India recent years. She thought most of them from India wanted to be illegal workers and earned money faster. Cosmo Beatson, CEO of Vision First, said that there are many problems in India such as human right, we can't say there are no real cases form Indian asylum seekers.

In order to fasten the application duration, Immigration Department said they would shorten the application time form 25 weeks to 15 weeks by simplifying the procedure. For around 50% asylum seekers are illegal comers, they will try harder to block from the source (countries they are from), and reexamine the free VISA policy for some countries.

Christian Action's counselor, Jeff Andrews, said they have encountered some fake refugees, they will use the regulations given by United Nations to judge whether they are real or fake. Jeff thought the rules used by Immigration Department was not clear enough, and he suggested that Immigration Department should know more about different problems faced by asylum seekers in different countries.

Sabir's family get housing and food allowance form ISS, get support of school fee form gov and friends. Although he and his wife cannot work and live as asylum seekers in HK, he thought HK was safer than Pakistan. If the application being rejected, it will become a nightmare for Sabir. He does not really care about himself, he cares about his daughters' lives. He hopes HK Government can judge his case fairly.

Part 2

Describing the poor living condition of asylum seekers in new territories. During interview, an old woman claimed she were the house owner, and complained there was a tenant (also asylum seeker) occupied much space of her house to put rubbish.

Another tenant, Lena, from Indonesia, said she did not realize what happened the old woman said. She came to HK 4 years ago, but there is no any response from Immigration Department. ISS gave her 1500 housing allowance per month, but she should move in late October. But many local renters not quite willing to rent house to asylum seeker (as a foreigner, or black skin ppl).

Adella criticized ISS haven't bear social responsibilities to ensure that asylum seekers are live in a proper place.

Is the allowance (around HKD3,000) enough? Annie Lin from SOCO (Society For Community Organization) said giving money for basic life support to asylum seekers/ refugees are not enough, HK Government should think in a long-term way to help them to sustain the life. Many asylum seekers told to her, mainly concerning about their future, they felt confusing about their future.

Brain (fake name) fled from western Africa to HK when he was 16 years old (11 years before), in order to avoid the war. He became a recognized refugee 9 years ago, but no country wanna receive him. The life has nothing changed after becoming a recognized refugee, he still cannot work, cannot leave HK. Brain said that if the Government cannot send me to another countries, the best way is to let me work so that he can sustain his life by himself.

Legislative Council Member, Elizabeth Quat, thought if there were so many fake refugees, how can the Government take good care of real refugees? She thought the allowance given by HK Government is the main inducement that attracted many asylum seekers coming to HK. She suggested that Government should set a

time limit of using allowances, to ensure asylum seekers cannot non-stop using the Government money. She said, as more and more “fake refugees” come to HK, Government will use more and more money for their legal support. She said it is a high time to reexamine Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Annie Lin from SOCO said the main problem is the Government policy. Immigration Department only commit they will not send them back during application period, but offer no legal status for asylum seekers.

Christian Action’s centre usually provides food for refugees/ asylum seekers to give them warmth. And Refugee Union help asylum seekers’ children to learn Cantonese.

More and more refugees fled to another countries for safe life, but how many of them are fake as HK Chief Executive CY Leung said, or how many of them are treated as fake but actually they are real? It seems hard to find out the answer.

(Translation by a HKBU Journalism student)