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Attn: News Desks, Picture Desks

For Immediate Release

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International Social Service new policy oppresses refugees through the manipulation of food supplies

Protest Action – Tuesday September 24, 2pm ISS Tsuen Wan office 118 Chuen Long Street, Tsuen Wan

Vision First is a proponent of the view that every protection claim must be approached on the premise that it is genuine, until it is proven that it cannot be substantiated by a claimant. No adverse inferences must be drawn against any refugee until all legal remedies are exhausted.

In the interim, this principle maintains that refugees should benefit from the rights and privileges enjoyed by all citizens. It is categorically erroneous to view refugees as ‘unwelcomed guests’ who abuse the city’s welfare system. They are welcomed by Hong Kong’s promise of protection.

Refugees have a right to be in Hong Kong and receive welfare assistance while their claims are determined. Since they are banned from working, they depend entirely on government assistance to meet their basic needs. Food is an obvious priority for all human beings.

International Social Services (ISS) are contracted by Social Welfare Department to provide assistance to the refugee population. Vision First has exposed ISS’ failures to house refugees in widespread media and advocacy action. It appears that ISS acts as an agent of social control, rather than as a charitable organization genuinely interested in the well-being of those it serves.

Since 2006 refugees have collected food rations every ten days. The provision might have been of inferior quality, but met nutritional needs. This September, ISS changed the distribution to five days, citing a demand for fresher produce. In fact, the frequency increase was not matched by an increase in quality or freshness. Instead the change concealed a troubling reduction in quantity.

By official accounts, the food allowance is worth 1,060 HK\$. However, it can be purchased at supermarkets for 800 HK\$ without the wholesale advantage and economics of scale of supplying 4700 individuals monthly. Something is amiss. Vision First calls for a thorough investigation. For more information on this worrying issue, we draw attention to these blogs, “ISS eating refugees’ food money?” and “ISS revised food distribution is malicious”.

More/

Today, refugees and their children are stranded in a position in which they are not provided with sufficient food. Should they work for cash, they risk stiff prison sentences for breaching their conditions of stay, namely 18-22 months incarceration.

There is a sense that refugees are exasperated by ISS' disregard of their basic needs, indeed of their basic humanity. The refugee community feels that ISS does not care about their well-being. They have complained to ISS case workers about the misguided changes to food distribution, but their pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

To voice their despair, refugees are taking to the streets on Tuesday afternoon in Tsuen Wan.

An African refugee mother says,

"It's more than worse than before with the food provided to me. How can i feed three kids on ten rotten eggs given to me on the first time? And they say the food is fresh. (We collected) 1 litre of milk, 6 packs of juice, 6 pieces of meat and 1 chicken piece for five days. "

A Pakistani refugee says,

"I used to get 15 Kg of rice and eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Now I only get 10 Kg and I don't have enough to eat. How can I buy what I need if I am not allowed to work? This means that ISS does not want me to survive. Will ISS go to jail with me when I am arrested?"

A Bangladeshi refugee says,

"I have to travel more than an hours to get food in Yuen Long and ISS doesn't repay the bus fare (in full). After I come home I have only flour, oil, sugar and cooking gas. What do I eat? The old system was good to eat 80%. This is less than half of what we need. ISS wants to hurt refugees for complaining about the bad service we get for years."

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Notes to Editors:

What: Protest against ISS food distribution

When: Tuesday September 24, 2013, 2pm

Why: To demand changes to a food distribution that fails to meet refugee needs.

Who: 200 refugees supported by legislator **Fernando Cheung**.

Where: outside ISS Tsuen Wan office at 118 Chuen Long Street, Tsuen Wan, NT