

10 March 2015

**Social Welfare Department**

8/F, Wu Chung House  
213 Queen's Road East  
Wanchai  
Hong Kong

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Ref: Suggestions on changes to welfare assistance**

A month ago we wrote to you regarding tender number: SWD / T003/2014. This was in regards to the provision of assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. In the letter we highlighted a few issues that we thought are of critical importance for your knowledge and to assist you in your decision making as you prepare to award this tender.

As you are well aware, refugees have a lot of reservations to the services rendered by your private contractor ISS-HK. We have lodged several complaints with your office in respect of these issues with no positive outcome. During this same period, Longhair from the League of Social Democrats (LSD) wrote to SWD requesting more information on the above tender. The response to his letter was that SWD carried out an audit on the ISS-HK system and found no issues were located. To be honest, this is quite hard to believe that no issues were found in the practices of ISS when numerous complaints have been made by different parties.

With this in mind the Refugee Union, in conjunction with its members, have debated what is required to ensure integrity in ISS-HK, ensure refugees are treated fairly and lastly, to ensure a better future and relationship between ISS-HK and refugees in Hong Kong.

The Refugee Union suggest the following changes in food, housing and quality of life.

**1. Food**

- a) We no longer wish to collect our food rations from the current contractors as currently constituted through ISS Hong Kong and its affiliates after the expiry of the current tender. This is due to the food issued to us by ISS and its contracted companies are mostly not fresh and we feel that this is not right. We are requesting this also due to the branded food items that we receive can only be found in those shops. It's impossible to get the same from supermarkets outside. We request you to enter into arrangements with the various supermarkets or grocery stores that

serve the Hong Kong public where we can collect our food by use of vouchers or food coupons. This will ensure that we get value for money as the current system short-changes us by dispensing unpriced items which we are unable to be reliably appraise.

- b) We believe the food we are served is not to minimum health and safety standards and would not pass the minimum standards of the Hong Kong Centre for Food Safety. For example, fruits, vegetable, baking flour, rice and milk among others. Can you also please confirm if the same food authority body certifies food supplied to refugees and normal retail supermarkets and grocery stores. Please note, the Refugee Union is prepared to take this matter to the Hong Kong Centre for Food Safety, as well as other relevant food authorities for investigation
- c) Food rations currently being offered are not enough and allocating refugees 40 HK\$ a day is too little to sustain us. In actual sense the amounts do not add up to your claims of levels of assistance. We request you to relook at this budget in a more humane and sensitive manner.
- d) Lastly we draw your attention to the investigative report by Cable TV that exposed the problem we have lamented about for years, namely, that refugees do not take home the full value of the food assistance as published by the government, but we are seriously short-changed by the distribution channel.

[難民領取食物包被指縮水](#)

## **2. Housing**

- a) We request the government, through its appointed officers in SWD, find suitable living locations for refugees and take part in the signing of rental agreements, creating a relationship between SWD and the landlord to ensure safe and practical living conditions are met. This will enable refugees to live in favourable conditions as opposed to the current arrangement where many of us lives in slum-like conditions due to budget and cost restrictions. The Government is then responsible for setting the budget for housing, inspecting the property and overseeing practices and lastly, the government would then be responsible for paying the landlord directly. This will ensure the government is able to keep accurate records of occupied land used for refugees. This is logical since we are not allowed to work.

## **3. Quality of Life**

- a. It is a basic human right to have clothing. Currently we do not get clothing, including shoes, from ISS-HK. We request funds for clothing to be introduced. As an alternate practice, the Refugee Union may accept ISS-HK supplying clothing vouchers to be issued periodically to refugees.

- b. We request a review of the current levels of welfare assistance from the government as the current rates do not cover the basic minimum quality of life for refugees in Hong Kong causing some many to have to beg for money to cover expensive for our families. For example, 200 HK dollars per month is not enough to meet our transport needs. We are requesting this amount to be raised to 600 HK\$ as it would be a reasonable amount of assistance for refugees to travel monthly.

We would be grateful if you would carefully consider the points raised in this letter. These changes would have a positive effect for the refugee community. We look forward to your response in building a stronger relationship between SWD and the Refugee Union.

Yours faithfully,

Refugee Union