

## **Refugee rent allowance is not enough for 1 room**

The Hong Kong Government has given HK\$200 million to the ISS or the social welfare department, for purpose of providing food and housing assistance to 4700 asylum seekers in the city. Yet, some associations have found that some asylum seekers have no proper place to live at. Indian torture claimants had to stay under the bridge on the Ferry Street. After staying in the open area for 3 years, they were forced to move when the government enforced the environmental renovation project. Other Bangladeshi asylum seekers stay at the leaking huts in Fanling. They specified that it is extremely difficult to find or afford proper and humane accommodation with the HK\$1200 housing allowance.

The Yau Tsim Mong District Council had agreed to the funding for the renovation around the Ferry Street and for the construction of a pet park. The project costs about HK\$2.53 million. About 20 homeless vagrants were forced to leave the area under the bridge where they inhabited. In particular, the 25 years old Indian asylum seeker (Mike) previously stayed under the bridge for 3 years. 6 years ago, Mike came to Hong Kong due to political reasons. His application under the Convention Against Torture has not been approved. Hence, he has no identity card, and he may not work in Hong Kong. After seeking help from ISS, he is not even entitled to the \$1200 housing allowance because he does not have a regular dwelling and is homeless. Thus, Mike could only move and stay at another open area under a bridge.

Mike criticized the authorities not only for failing to find him a proper accommodation, but also for forcing him to leave his only “home” on the Ferry Street. In fact, some Convention Against Torture applicants from Bangladesh are staying at “shelter” in Fanling. However, the living condition of the squatter area is extremely poor and inhumane (see the other article). According to the data provided by Security Bureau, there are around 10,000 asylum seekers who came

to Hong Kong, in pursuance to the Convention Against Torture. They do not have the right to work during the application process.

The Social Welfare Department explained that they could refer the asylum seekers to the ISS for further assessment and assistance. The Government has also given about HK \$200 million of funds to the ISS. Approximately, 4,700 applicants are receiving assistance. Under the scheme, the ISS would assess individual needs of the claimants. They can obtain the assistance once a month, including daily necessities, and medical and transportation allowances. They are also given meat, vegetables, rice and other foods and beverages every 10 days. The applicants may also rent a house separately or together with other applicants, where the rent allowance, water and electricity fees would be given to the landowner directly.