

Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony
Notes of the meeting on 21 May 2021

Present

Home Affairs Department (HAD)

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| Miss Vega Wong (Chairperson) | Deputy Director of Home Affairs |
| Mr Howard Yam | Assistant Director of Home Affairs |
| Ms Rebecca Chan | Chief Executive Officer |
| Mr Alfred Shum (Secretary) | Senior Executive Officer |

Official Members

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| Miss Cathy Li | Principal Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs (5), Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau |
| Mr Yeung Sze-kit | Education Officer (Placement & Support) ² , Education Bureau |
| Ms Kelly Chan | Principal Information Officer (Local Promotions), Information Services Department |
| Mr John Chong | Labour Officer (Employment Services) ² , Labour Department |

Non-official Members

Mr Mohamed Ibramsa Sikkander Batcha
Dr Theresa Cunanan
Mr Syed Ekram Elahi
Ms Rita Gurung
Mr Hung Chiu Wah, Derek
Mrs Poonam Vijayprakash Mehta
Ms Lamia Sreya Rahman
Ms Tsui Hang On, Yvonne
Mr Wong Ka Chun
Mr Wong Man Ho, Matthew

In Attendance

Mr Raymond Ho
Senior Equal Opportunities Officer
Ethnic Minorities Unit
Equal Opportunities Commission

For Agenda Item (3)

Dr Raymond Ho
Head, Health Promotion Branch
Department of Health (DH)

Dr Gladys Yeung
Senior Medical and Health Officer (Health
Promotion) 4, Health Promotion Branch
DH

Dr Sam Li
Medical and Health Officer (Health
Promotion) 5, Health Promotion Branch
DH

For Agenda Item (4)

Ms Pang Kit-ling
Assistant Director (Family and Child
Welfare), Social Welfare Department
(SWD)

Miss Shea Ka-shuen
Senior Social Work Officer (Family)2
SWD

For Agenda Item (5)

Mr Chau Kam-tim
Assistant Commissioner for Census and
Statistics (Social), Census and Statistics
Department (C&SD)

Absent with apologies

Ms Ping Somporn Bevan
Ms Cheung Yee May, Mimi
Mr Vijay Harilela

Mr Avinash Chandiram Hotchadani
Mr Akil Khan
Ms Kong Man Wai, Vivian
Ms Rigam Rai
Dr Chura Bahadur Thapa

1. Introduction

1.1 The Chairperson welcomed Members to the meeting. She expressed her gratitude to Members who attended the COVID-19 Vaccination Seminar held at the Yau Tsim Mong Multicultural Activity Centre on 18 April 2021 and appealed for Members' support in encouraging the ethnic minority communities to get vaccinated.

2. Confirmation of the notes of discussion on 30 June 2020

2.1 The notes of the last meeting held on 30 June 2020 were confirmed.

3. Matters arising from the meeting on 30 June 2020

3.1 A Member enquired about the implementation progress of the enhanced support measures for ethnic minorities announced in the 2018 Policy Address. The Chairperson replied that the Steering Committee on Ethnic Minorities Affairs chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration was responsible for overseeing the implementation and asked the Secretary to check with its secretariat.

(Post-meeting notes: Information on the implementation progress of the enhanced support measures for ethnic minorities was sent to Members on 3 June 2021.)

4. Prevention, Testing and Vaccination for COVID-19

4.1 At the invitation of the Chairperson, Dr Raymond Ho and Dr Gladys Yeung briefed Members on DH's effort in fighting COVID-19 including measures to disseminate health information to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

4.2 Issues raised by Members and the discussions were summarised below:

4.2.1 A Member asked whether the age limit for vaccination would be lowered and what the plan for encouraging school children to get vaccinated was. Dr Ho replied that the details were being worked out. The Government would enlist the support of schools and parents to ensure vaccination was done in a safe and orderly manner.

4.2.2 A Member thanked the Government and community leaders for their joint efforts to promote the vaccination programme to ethnic minorities. However, he expressed concern that some part of the community was still unable to appreciate the benefits and know about the possible side effects of the vaccines. Another Member suggested that DH could come to her centre to organise health talks. Dr Ho said that DH had been organising onsite and online health talks for ethnic minorities, and would welcome collaborations with community stakeholders including NGOs. Moreover, the United Christian Nethersole Community Health Service were engaged to conduct door-to-door promotion to reach out to ethnic minorities and hotlines in ethnic minority languages were set up to assist ethnic minorities in making appointments and answer their enquiries. He thanked Members for their generous support and said that the Government would continue to engage relevant stakeholders to promote the messages.

4.2.3 A Member was worried that people were not interested in getting vaccinated so the vaccination rate in Hong Kong would remain low. Dr Ho replied that vaccine hesitancy could be attributed to many factors. For instance, COVID-19 vaccines were relatively new and the public may not perceive an imminent need to get vaccinated when the number of local COVID-19 cases remained low. Nonetheless, it had been suggested that when a large proportion of the population was vaccinated, the number of cases would decrease and a normal life could be resumed. He emphasized that the two vaccines being used in Hong Kong were considered safe and effective. Serious side effects were rare. Within the 15- to 30-minute observation period after vaccination, medical staff in vaccination centres would provide immediate assistance if necessary. The Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation performed continuous monitoring of the possible adverse events following administration of COVID-19 vaccines, and considered

that there was no unusual pattern identified so far. Dr Ho said that the Government would adopt a targeted approach to reach out to people in different sectors and make arrangement for group vaccination as appropriate.

4.2.4 In response to an enquiry about the number of ethnic minorities who had received vaccination, Dr Ho replied that such statistics was not available because the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Booking System did not record the ethnicity of people being vaccinated.

4.2.5 A Member wondered why people who were fully vaccinated and those who were not were all sent to quarantine centres for 21 days if they lived in a building with confirmed cases. Dr Ho replied that more prudent quarantine arrangements were adopted initially when COVID-19 mutant strains were involved. Quarantine and testing requirements were reviewed continuously in light of more epidemiological evidence.

4.2.6 Dr Ho welcomed members to approach DH to discuss collaboration opportunities in disseminating information on COVID-19 to the ethnic minorities communities.

4.2.7 The Chairperson thanked Dr Ho, Dr Yeung and Dr Li for their sharing.

5. Enhanced Support Measures in Social Welfare for Ethnic Minorities

5.1 At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms Pang Kit-ling briefed Members on the latest progress and achievements on the enhanced support measures announced in the 2018 Policy Address. Two key new initiatives, namely the Outreaching Team for Ethnic Minorities (OTEM) and Ethnic Minorities District Ambassador Pilot Scheme (the Ambassador Scheme), were launched in 2020 to strengthen welfare support to ethnic minorities.

5.2 Issues raised by Members and the discussions were summarised below:

5.2.1 With regard to the project duration, Ms Pang said that OTEM was a regular subvented service while the Ambassador Scheme was a 3-year pilot project.

- 5.2.2 In response to an enquiry about the training for the OTEM staff, Ms Pang replied that the NGO operators were responsible for training the OTEM staff such as providing them with information on mainstream service, teaching them how to plan and organise group activities, and equipping them with skills in assessing the clients' needs. At the same time, local staff of the NGOs would benefit from increased exposure to diverse cultures through working with ethnic minority counterparts.
- 5.2.3 A Member recalled that SWD had in 2008 provided some temporary job opportunities (Programme Worker posts) through NGOs for the youths. He suggested a similar programme for ethnic minorities could be implemented. Ms Pang replied that providing the posts of temporary Programme Workers to a number of subvented non-governmental organisations was a special measure introduced during the economic downturn to strengthen youth employment at that moment. Since then, NGO operators of the Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres had all along been employing ethnic minorities to attract new service users of similar ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, NGOs had the flexibility to employ their own staff with different ethnic origins with lump sum grants from SWD. Although it was not the major objective of the two new initiatives, the OTEM and the Ambassador Scheme had created more job opportunities for people of diverse race.
- 5.2.4 A Member asked how closely SWD worked with the Housing Authority to address the housing need of non-Chinese communities in Hong Kong. Ms Pang said that while there was no specific housing service for ethnic minorities, SWD would assist people in need to apply for housing or Comprehensive Social Security Assistance when necessary.
- 5.2.5 A Member raised the issue of labelling effect of the term "ethnic minorities" and considered that it might create segregation between local Chinese and people of other races. Another Member echoed her view and pointed out that an NGO had promoted the use of "non-ethnic Chinese" as an alternative. Ms Pang explained that the term was somehow used to clarify the availability of services to this specific group of beneficiaries, not bearing any meaning of discrimination. The Chairperson added that the Government had updated the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality to promote the use more neutral and inclusive terms like

“people of diverse race”. She said that the Government had been using the term for some time to refer to a sector of the community with common needs and might continue to appear in the course of Government business or publications for some time. It was by no means discriminatory or derogatory and no reference was made to people by their skin colours.

5.3 The Chairperson thanked Ms Pang and Miss Shea for the presentation.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 2021 Population Census

6.1.1 At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr Chau Kam-tim of C&SD gave a presentation on the arrangement of upcoming Population Census which will be commenced in June 2021. He said that carrying out a census during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging. Respondents were encouraged to participate through telephone interview, online questionnaires or postal returns to reduce face-to-face contacts. Service assistants who could speak Urdu or Nepali would be deployed in regional census service centres and telephone centres to answer enquiries and conduct telephone interviews. A thematic website and posters in multiple languages had been rolled out to enlist support to the Population Census.

6.2 District-based Programmes for Racial Harmony

6.2.1 The Chairperson informed the meeting that for the third year in a row, eligible NGOs were invited under the District-based Programme for Racial Harmony to apply for funding between \$100,000 and \$300,000, depending on the ethnic minority population in the districts, to organise activities that would encourage interaction and exchange between Chinese and ethnic minority communities. Details had been sent to Members for information and circulation to their communities. Applications would close on 4 June 2021.

6.3 The Chairperson expressed her gratitude to Mr Mohamed Batcha and Dr Theresa Cunanan for their dedicated service to this Committee in the

past six years and looked forward to working with them in other capacities. Two new members, namely Mr Zaman Minhas Qamar and Miss Himeshika Samaradivakara, would join the Committee in June.

6.4 The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

6.5 For the date of next meeting, Members would be duly informed nearer the time.

Home Affairs Department
June 2021