

Hong Kong committed to protecting human rights

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) was fully committed to the protection of human rights, the United Nations Human Rights Committee heard today (March 20 New York time) in the hearing of Hong Kong's second report in light of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

At the opening of the two-day hearing in New York, Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs Mrs Carrie Lam assured the committee of the SAR Government's unwavering determination and efforts in safeguarding human rights in the territory.

"In Hong Kong, human rights and freedoms are guaranteed constitutionally by the Basic Law. And the rule of law and an independent judiciary, also guaranteed by the Basic Law, provide the fundamental basis for human rights protection in Hong Kong", she said.

On constitutional development, Mrs Lam told the Committee that the Government consistently maintained the position that the electoral system of the HKSAR Legislative Council did not contravene provisions of the ICCPR as applied to Hong Kong. She specifically referred to the reservation made in respect of Article 25(b) when the Covenant was extended by the United Kingdom Government to Hong Kong in 1976 which continues to apply to the HKSAR after the reunification. This reservation allows the HKSAR to decide the method of formation of the Legislative Council in the light of the actual situation and the principle of gradual and orderly progress as stipulated under the Basic Law.

The ICCPR is one of the six international human rights treaties applicable to Hong Kong which entail reporting obligations. It has been extended to Hong Kong since 1976. Basic Law Article 39 stipulates that the provisions of the Covenant, along with those of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and international labour conventions as applied to Hong Kong shall remain in force and be implemented through the laws of Hong Kong after the territory's reunification with China in 1997.

The HKSAR's first report in light of the ICCPR was submitted and heard by the committee in 1999.

Deputy Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Ambassador Zhang Yishan introduced the HKSAR delegation to the hearing. The 10-member strong delegation led by Mrs Lam consists of the Solicitor General, Mr Robert Allcock and representatives from the Department of Justice, Constitutional Affairs Bureau, Security Bureau and Home Affairs Bureau.

The committee received the HKSAR Government's second report on the implementation of the ICCPR in January, 2005, and sought further information on a list of issues in December, 2005. Members of the committee will discuss these issues with the government delegation during the two-day hearing on March 20 and 21.

The second report and the Government's detailed response to the list of issues are available for public reference on the Home Affairs Bureau's website at http://www.hab.gov.hk/en/publications_and_press_releases/reports.html.

Ends/Tuesday, March 21, 2006