

Government's response on situation of foreign domestic helpers affected by COVID-19 (with photos)

With reference to the concerns about foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) affected by the 5th wave of the COVID-19 epidemic in Hong Kong, a spokesman for the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) said today (March 5) that the HKSAR Government is working in concert with the relevant Consulates General in Hong Kong to render them statutory and compassionate protection.

Currently, about 330 000 FDHs, coming mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, are serving local families in Hong Kong. The HKSAR Government and the local community greatly value and appreciate the significant contributions rendered by FDHs in support of families and the local economy. We much empathise with their not being able to visit their families back at home because of the ravaging epidemic. The HKSAR Government is committed to continue protecting the employment rights and interests of FDHs in order to maintain Hong Kong as an attractive place for FDHs to work.

The HKSAR Government does not and will not tolerate any employers of FDHs illegally dismissing FDHs who have suffered from the COVID-19 and in violation of the Employment Ordinance (EO). Under the EO, an employer is prohibited from terminating the contract of employment of an employee on his/her paid sickness day, except in cases of summary dismissal due to the latter's serious misconduct. An employer who contravenes relevant provisions of the EO commits an offence and is liable to prosecution and, upon conviction, to a maximum fine of \$100,000. The HKSAR Government has continuously reminded employers of their statutory obligations and requirements under the EO and the Standard Employment Contract amidst the pandemic. Any breach of such requirements will render them ineligible to employ an FDH for a period of time and their visa applications for FDHs will be refused. Employers are also reminded of the possible violation of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance if they treat their FDHs less favourably (for example, by dismissing them) because the FDHs have been infected with or recovered from COVID-19. The HKSAR Government will stay vigilant in taking enforcement actions against any violation of law in liaison and collaboration with the relevant Consulates General.

For those FDHs under employment who test positive to the COVID-19 or are regarded as close contacts, they will receive support like any other citizens of Hong Kong. The HKSAR Government, with the staunch support of the Central People's Government, is expanding the capacity of community isolation facilities for those to whom priority should be accorded for isolation outside of the home environment. For those FDHs currently without employment in Hong Kong, the Labour Department has been assisting in their admission to suitable facilities with the support and assistance of the relevant

Consulates General.

On the other hand, the HKSAR Government wishes to extend its sincere gratitude to employers of FDHs and the FDHs themselves for heeding the HKSAR Government's advice to stay home as far as possible on their rest days in order to reduce the people flow to prevent the spread of the virus. Over the recent weekends, we noticed that FDH gatherings in popular spots had been significantly reduced.

"The 5th wave of the COVID-19 epidemic has hit us hard and we could only overcome this major challenge with the full support and co-operation of the community. FDHs working in Hong Kong are a core part of our community and we believe the great majority of their employers are responsible and reasonable. The HKSAR Government will protect the legitimate rights and interests of FDHs in Hong Kong," the spokesman said.

