

HKSAR Government condemns Radio Free Asia for its false report

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government strongly disapproved of and condemned the Radio Free Asia's misleadingly-headlined report of June 20 which makes untruthful and smearing remarks against the invalidation exercise of the old form of smart identity cards (ID cards), intending to mislead the public and defame the relevant measures and arrangements announced by the HKSAR Government and the Immigration Department (ImmD). The HKSAR Government considers it necessary to clarify to set the record straight.

By selectively quoting phrases announced by the ImmD at its press conference and elaborating unfounded speculation, the article headlined: "HKSAR government 'threatens' citizens to return to Hong Kong and renew their old ID cards – Will there be consequences for overseas Hong Kong residents failing to replace their ID cards?" falsely reported and maliciously distorted the original purpose of the ID card invalidation exercise. Not only did Radio Free Asia cite comments from a purported former immigration assistant who fabricated as an insider and misinterpreted relevant legal provisions and legal consequences, they also did not make any inquiries with the Government prior to publishing the article or conduct any fact checking. Radio Free Asia has completely violated media professional ethics and basic journalistic morality.

The HKSAR Government reiterated that the invalidation of old ID cards aimed to detect impersonation and possession of forged ID cards. The arrangements were in line with the previous replacement exercise, which does not involve any form of intimidation. According to section 7B(3) of the Registration of Persons Ordinance, any person without a reasonable excuse but fails to replace their ID cards during the specified call-up period is liable to a fine of \$5,000. Those who has been absent from Hong Kong during the replacement period will not commit an offence as long as they replace their ID cards within 30 days of their return to Hong Kong. The ImmD had set out clearly at the press conference on June 18 that the invalidation of old ID cards will not affect one's right of abode in Hong Kong and they could still travel in and out of Hong Kong as long as holding a valid travel document. Radio Free Asia's deliberate distortion on the Government's appeal into means of intimidating the public was an extremely irresponsible act.

A spokesman for the HKSAR Government pointed out that any person who enters Hong Kong with an invalid ID card will have to surrender their cards and be ordered to apply for renewal within a specified period of time. According to section 19(4) of the Registration of Persons Regulations, failure to comply with the order to apply for renewal may result in a maximum fine of \$25,000 and two years' imprisonment. Not to mention that without proper verification of facts, the report of the Radio Free Asia had misled the members of public by conflating the two provisions and relevant legal consequences.

The Radio Free Asia had disregarded journalistic ethics and distorted the Government's policies and measures in an utterly irresponsible manner. The Government's good intent in appealing public members for ID card replacement has been manipulated into a conspiracy to suppress Hong Kong people. The report is a piece of scaremongering fake information that smears the HKSAR Government. The HKSAR Government strongly condemns and calls on members of the public to ignore false information and discern the facts.