

## LCQ3: Foreign domestic helpers congregating in public places during holidays

Following is a question by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 23):

Question:

At present, there are over 350 000 foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) in Hong Kong. During holidays, a large number of FDHs congregate in public places, such as parks, footbridge passages and places under flyovers. They sit, eat and sleep on the ground, thus affecting the daily lives of the public, the operation of shops and the environmental hygiene in public places. The problem has persisted for many years and shows a worsening trend. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Whether it knows the details (to be set out by District Council district) of various popular gathering places for FDHs during holidays, including the average number of FDHs gathering, the duration of gathering, the general activities conducted by FDHs, and the number of personnel deployed by the various government departments to station in those places during the relevant periods; if it does not have such information, of the reasons for that and whether it will collect such information; the respective numbers of the various kinds of relevant complaints received by the authorities, and the respective numbers of FDHs who were given verbal warnings, issued penalty tickets, served summons and convicted for the various types of law-breaking acts, in each of the past three years;

(2) Given that the Government launched a scheme in 1994 to establish centres for FDHs under which the premises on loan by seven schools during weekends were used as activity centres for FDHs, but only one centre remains in operation at present, of the current or past details of each of the centres, including the years in which they were opened and closed down, the facilities provided therein, weekly opening hours and average utilisation rates, as well as reasons for closure; whether the authorities have reviewed the objectives of the scheme, its operational difficulties and effectiveness; if so, of the outcome and the improvement measures; whether the authorities will consider setting up more centres in various districts for convenient use by FDHs; and

(3) On the premise of balancing the rights of both FDHs and members of the public to use public places and the related obligations, of the authorities' new thinking on alleviating the problem caused by the congregation of FDHs in public places during holidays?

Reply:

President,

Currently, there are almost 380 000 foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) working in Hong Kong. FDHs assist local families in performing household chores and taking care of their children and elderly, thereby unleashing the potential of our local labour force and contributing significantly to Hong Kong's development. The Government has strived to enhance the protection and support for FDHs through various means, such as publicity and educational activities, in order to maintain Hong Kong as an attractive place for FDHs to work in.

A consolidated reply in consultation with the concerned bureaux and departments to the sub-questions raised by the Member is set out as follows:

(1) The Government does not maintain detailed statistics on the gathering of FDHs in public places during holidays. Generally speaking, FDHs tend to gather during the daytime on Saturdays and Sundays in parks or footbridges in the Central and Western District and Yau Tsim Mong District, Victoria Park and its nearby areas in Wai Chai District, and areas under Kwai Chung Road Flyover in Mei Foo for social or religious gatherings and activities. Government departments do not specially deploy personnel to station at FDH gathering places.

The number of complaints received by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) relating to the gathering of FDHs in LCSD facilities during holidays, the numbers of cases of verbal warnings, penalty tickets and summonses issued and the number of convictions in the past three years are at the Annex. Other Government departments do not maintain the relevant statistical breakdowns on cases relating to FDHs.

(2) In 1994, the Government, with the co-operation of various bureaux and departments (including the then Urban Services Department (now the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD)), the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), the then Education Department (now the Education Bureau), the Transport Department and the Home Affairs Bureau/Home Affairs Department), leased a former school site in Kennedy Town to the Hong Kong Bayanihan Trust (the Trust) to set up an Overseas Domestic Helpers Centre (the Centre) for FDHs to gather and organise activities on their rest days. The Trust is a non-profit making organisation formed by a group of Filipino businessmen in Hong Kong. The finance, promotion and management of the Centre are fully undertaken by the Trust. The Centre opens daily except Fridays (9am to 5pm from Monday to Thursday; 9am to 6pm on Saturday and 9am to 7pm on Sunday), providing facilities such as auditorium, classrooms, library, music room, photocopying machines, etc. The Centre has been operating till now, attracting up to 1 800 FDHs to use its facilities on every Sunday and public holiday. According to the arrangement, the Trust can, subject to demand and practical situation, apply directly to six schools for organising activities in their venues on Sundays. The Government has no plan to set up additional Centres at this stage.

(3) The problems caused by the gathering of FDHs involve various law enforcement agencies such as the FEHD, LCSD, Immigration Department (ImmD)

and HKPF. The District Offices will, in light of the requests by the relevant District Councils (DCs), local personalities and bureaux/departments, liaise and co-ordinate, where necessary, with the enforcement agencies in the districts to conduct joint operations in accordance with their respective functions.

In the joint operation, the District Offices will also, together with the law enforcement agencies concerned, educate relevant persons and liaise with relevant FDHs' associations as necessary to address the said problems. For instance, there are cases where illegal catering by FDHs has been found in and outside Victoria Park. The Wan Chai District Management Committee, in conjunction with the FEHD, LCSD, ImmD, HKPF and DC members, distributed leaflets to FDHs in Victoria Park and the nearby areas to remind them not to carry out hawking activities, illegal catering and obstruct public pedestrian walkways.

Apart from gathering in public places, same as other members of the public and/or organisations, individual FDHs and/or FDH organisations could, subject to meeting the relevant venue hiring conditions, book different public venues and facilities (such as sports and cultural venues and community hall facilities) from relevant departments for use or organisation of various kinds of activities.