

Men given suspended jail sentence and fines for keeping and operating guesthouses illegally

Two men were charged with contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts and the Shatin Magistrates' Courts today (December 19). One man was sentenced to four weeks' imprisonment, suspended for three years, and fined \$18,000, and the other man was fined \$10,000.

The courts heard that in January and April this year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), the Home Affairs Department, inspected two suspected unlicensed guesthouses on Paterson Street in Causeway Bay and Hoi Pong Street in Tap Mun. During the inspections, the OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented rooms in the guesthouses on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's records, the guesthouses did not possess licences under the Ordinance on the days of inspection. The men responsible for keeping and operating the guesthouses were charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

Furthermore, OLA officers inspected a licensed guesthouse on Paterson Street in Causeway Bay in March this year. This guesthouse was operated by the man who kept the aforementioned unlicensed guesthouse on the same street. The officers found that the actual layout of the premises deviated from the registered drawings and the alteration had not been approved by the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Authority. Conditions 3 and 17 of the licence were breached. Therefore, the man responsible for operating the premises was charged with contravening section 21(3)(a) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that keeping, operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and can lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaenq@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website (www.hadla.gov.hk), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".