

Office of Licensing Authority of Home Affairs Department steps up enforcement actions against unlicensed hotels/guesthouses before Chinese New Year holidays (with photo)

Before the Chinese New Year holidays, the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department conducted an operation codenamed "Solar Flare" against suspected unlicensed hotels and guesthouses at Yau Tsim Mong District for three consecutive days from January 14 to 16 to ensure the safety of lodgers as well as the general public.

A spokesman for the OLA said, "Based on intelligence gathered, the OLA carried out surprise inspections on six premises. All six premises were suspected of operating unlicensed hotels or guesthouses. The OLA will initiate prosecution on cases with sufficient evidence after completion of the investigation."

The spokesman stressed, "Operating unlicensed hotels or guesthouses is a criminal offence, and such an offence leads to a criminal record upon conviction. According to the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance, an offender is liable to three years' imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$500,000. A fine of \$20,000 for each day can also be imposed during which the offence continues. A six-month closure order may also be issued for a hotel or guesthouse involved in a repeated offence."

Apart from conducting special operations during festive seasons, the OLA also steps up efforts to combat unlicensed guesthouses via online platforms. The OLA has strengthened its intelligence collection by forming a dedicated team to browse webpages, mobile applications, social media, discussion forums, etc, to search for information and intelligence on suspected unlicensed guesthouses. The OLA's law enforcement officers will initiate follow-up investigations when information on unlicensed guesthouses advertised via online platforms is found. The OLA also conducts publicity work on Internet search engines outside Hong Kong to enable tourists' access to the information provided by the OLA in the course of planning their trips to Hong Kong.

Tourists and members of the public can make use of the search functions on the OLA's website to check whether the hotel or guesthouse concerned is licensed or not. Any suspected unlicensed hotel or guesthouse should be reported to the OLA by the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaeng@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".

