

Seventeen persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations, including an operation codenamed "Twilight", "Greenlane" and a joint operation with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion" from September 16 to 19. A total of 13 suspected illegal workers and four suspected employers were arrested.

During operations "Twilight" and "Greenlane", ImmD Task Force officers raided 28 target locations including a flower shop, a food processing factory, garbage collection depots, a residential flat, restaurants, recycling sites and a warehouse. The suspected illegal workers comprised three men and five women, aged 32 to 54. Among them, a woman was suspected of using and being in possession of a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Meanwhile, two men and two women, aged 29 to 76, were suspected of employing the suspected illegal workers.

In addition, during operation "Champion", enforcement officers raided four target locations in Wan Chai including massage parlours and restaurants. Five suspected illegal workers were arrested. The suspected illegal workers comprised a man and four women, aged 28 to 41.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman warned that it is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Offenders are liable to prosecution and a maximum penalty of a \$100,000 fine and up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card.

The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screenings of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threat and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of the exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.