

## Why we need to have a Child Policy in the new HKSAR Government in 2012?

### Preamble

There are many government bureaux and departments directly responsible or indirectly related to children. Under the present government structure, **Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau** is responsible for coordinating efforts in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child; **Food and Health Bureau** is responsible for medical, health and food hygiene policies for children and families; **Education Bureau** is responsible for education and career building policies for students and young people; **Labour and Welfare Bureau** is responsible for the welfare policies of children and families; **Security Bureau** will take care of children under special protection such as refugees, illegal immigrants, new arrivals... etc. However, there are also many other government bureaux and departments whose work will affect the life of children. For example, **Development Bureau** takes care of infrastructure and facilities related to children and families in public places; **Civil Service Bureau** has a 160,000-strong team of civil servants, and they need the skills to communicate with the children community; **Transport and Housing Bureau** takes care of the housing policy and road safety of children. Without a clear Child Policy that is cross-departmental, it is difficult to put children's needs at the heart of policy and agenda.

Traditional concepts always ignore children's voice. It is the inarguable truth that children lack representation in the government and institutions; and children have no right to vote and cannot use the democratic process to express their views through their representatives. Without a Child Policy to highlight the unique children's perspectives, children's needs and interests continue to languish at the bottom of the political agenda. Children's anxiety, disappointment, and indifference will directly influence the social harmony as they grow up, and influence their choice to stay in this place for the sustainability of Hong Kong.

### What the world has been doing to help raising the voice of children?

The United Nations announced the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2001, calling on governments around the world to fulfill their duty to the world's people, in particular children, to whom the future belongs. Many countries including the Mainland Authorities have echoed actively by preparing the first 10-year Development Sketch for Children (中國兒童發展綱要) for 2001-2010. Last year, the 2nd 10-year Development Sketch for Children for 2011-2020 was announced by the State Council and highlighted the duties of the government in achieving the MDG at different levels. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region should also do the same to fit the missing puzzle of the China's Report to the UN in helping to achieve the MDG.

Many countries around the world have kicked off various campaigns and actions to mobilize the government and non-governmental sectors to think and plan for children, future of the society, in an active way. Extensive consultations were conducted in the community before child policies and

children's acts were pushed through in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, UK and many other non-English speaking countries and cities. They also set up Children's Commissions to act as the major focal point and representing children. There are actually rich experiences from other countries that Hong Kong can draw upon.

### **What are our opportunities?**

This is the best of times for change. With the new government is going to the arena, this is the best of times for our HKSAR Chief Executive to prove visionary leadership by focusing on the youngest generation of Hong Kong, to pave way for hope and a bright future for all citizens of Hong Kong.

The Steering Committee on Population Policy has recently announced their Progress Report. However, the scope of exploration is too narrow, and the recommendations are too issue-oriented. Like what you had mentioned in your policy platform, *"The need for a comprehensive population policy cannot be over-emphasized. Indeed, it is long overdue and work must begin before our economic and social conditions begin to show sign of stress, and, more importantly, to ensure that our standard of living and development opportunities will continue to improve and our prosperity maintained."* The most valuable resource of any place is its people. This is the right time to plan for the future of Hong Kong, and we need to begin with our children, our future.

### **What actions we could take?**

There are steps that the new government shall consider:

- Kick off a community campaign like what you have done in the *Together we write the Manifesto* (齊心寫政綱) to come up with a mission statement for our 1.1 million children in Hong Kong. The mission statement must have good representation through extensive consultation in the community, including children, youth, families, professionals and important stakeholders. The mission statement shall be clearly reflected in policies and services of all government bureaux, departments, public bodies, and institutions with actions and pledges.
- Work out short, medium, and long-term plans for children, by highlighting the duties of various government bureaux, departments, and stakeholders, with a sound monitoring mechanism in place to measure the progress.
- Mandate the Central Policy Unit to look into the Child Policy for Hong Kong with specific initial focuses on poverty, housing, and population by conducting an in-depth research with local and overseas references. Using the research results as the foundation to develop the Hong Kong Child Policy; and expand the scope to cover all areas affecting children's healthy development from age 0-18 in the later stages.
- Follow the parallels overseas by setting up a solid and authoritative body for children, i.e. Children's Commission/Ombudsman to look into policies and practices related to children; to actively communicate with children to understand their needs, problems, and expectation; and partners with the Government to help advancing the needs and rights of children (Appendix 1).

Children are non-voters in any kind of election in Hong Kong. It is not an option but our duty to action for them. Let's join hands to move forward with 'One Heart' and 'Our Vision' for the children of Hong Kong. 讓我們齊心一意 撐香港的兒童！

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