

Consultation Paper

Advisory Committee on the Promotion of the Fighting Spirit against SARS

1. Introduction

1.1 The outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) early this year has taken away from many people their beloved ones, affected our daily life and caused considerable economic damages. Nevertheless, during the fight against SARS, citizens of Hong Kong demonstrated excellent civic qualities and humanitarian concerns. Staff in our health care system showed their devotion and professionalism; community groups initiated donation and care campaigns for hospital workers, victims' families and other needy people; all members of society worked together to upgrade the standard of public hygiene. These civic qualities helped relieve the frustration and anxiety induced by the SARS crisis, and also helped contain the spread of the epidemic. The Chinese proverb is probably right to say that "One's true feelings will be shown in times of hardship". Hong Kong people are perhaps too well-known for their individualism and entrepreneurship that we tend to forget their communitarian and humanitarian side, which is amply manifested in hard times. Valuable things should not slip into oblivion. We deem it necessary to keep a record of things in the past months and promote the spirit behind the fight against SARS.

1.2 The Chief Executive announced on 28 May 2003 the setting up of an advisory committee to gather opinion from all sectors of the community with a view to finding a permanent way to commemorate the spirit of Hong Kong demonstrated in the SARS crisis.

1.3 The first meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Promotion of the Fighting Spirit against SARS was held on 12 June 2003. The committee is chaired by the Secretary for Home Affairs, membership and terms of references of the committee are at the **Annex**.

1.4 Members of the Committee are of the view that every citizen was involved in the fight against SARS. All have their stories to tell. Commemorative activities should fulfill the common wish and reflect the collective memory. Through public consultation, the Committee would secure the consent and support of citizens from all walks of life.

2. Matters to be Consulted

2.1 Views will be gathered on:

- (a) What sort of Hong Kong spirit has been demonstrated in the SARS crisis?
- (b) What are the appropriate ways to commemorate the spirit of Hong Kong?
- (c) When will be the appropriate time to commemorate this spirit?

3. The Fighting Sprit Against SARS

3.1 Members suggested the followings:

a. Professionalism

We have an excellent and devoted team of medical professionals who have not withdrawn from their posts despite all risks and dangers. The researchers in the medical faculties of the two local universities upheld the scientific principles and worked ceaselessly on the pathology of this new disease and the effective cures. Responding to the call of the profession, many doctors and health assistants volunteered to enter the SARS wards and as at 13 June 2003, eight sacrificed their lives. They lost their lives for the medical profession and for humanity.

b. Solidarity for Humanitarianism

Disregarding status and standing, all citizens were affected by the epidemic. Though they might hold different views on the effectiveness of the preventive measures, all shared the common goal and worked with concerted efforts and in good sense. Our community network contributed tremendously to give moral support to our medical staff and offer help to the victims' families and the needy. The professionals, the commercial sector, NGOs as well as the media all did their best and gave what they could give. Relations among the family, the neighbourhood, colleagues and friends were never so close and comforting. Information were shared and things exchanged. We were facing a disaster, but we were not alone.

Most impressively, Hong Kong people treated others with love and showed solidarity in the crisis. For those who suffered from SARS and those who were rehabilitating, our citizens did not isolate them but gave them extra support morally and materially, so that they could return to normal life quickly. A foreign ship sailing past Hong Kong with suspected SARS cases was accepted by the Government according to international standards and on humanitarian grounds.

c) Consciousness for Public Hygiene

The public's consciousness for public hygiene was raised during the crisis. Apart from personal hygiene, the cleanliness of the neighbourhood and the environment also improved. Citizens began to realize that a clean household required the complement of a clean community. When one was keeping oneself clean, one was also offering protection for the others. Bad habits such as littering and stacking cast-offs received more public censure and would be more likely than ever to be corrected.

d) Rationality in a Civilized Society

The rationality shown by the Hong Kong citizens should indeed be commended. All stayed in their posts and business run as usual during the crisis. Normal life quickly resumed when the epidemic was contained. Employers and employees of the affected trades were willing to share the burden of poor business together. Citizens trusted the free market of Hong Kong and the government's regulatory system. The epidemic did not drive the prices of daily necessities up. The prices of medical products in short supply such as face-masks quickly resumed normal as we have the best logistics and market mechanism to meet the surge in demand. The havoc in some supermarkets at the beginning of the SARS outbreak caused by rumours lost its thrust, instantly after the government's announcement and assurance. In most of the time during the critical months, the citizens preserved with reason and endurance.

e) High Transparency in Information

Citizens would all agree that the status of Hong Kong as a metropolis depends on the free flow of information and the transparency in public affairs. The media fulfill their duties of a watchdog and conveyed updated information to the public. The government provided statistics on new SARS cases and affected buildings without infringing the privacy of the patients. The information urged residents to take extra

caution for prevention. The citizens' right to know was respected. We all worked with reason and the adverse influence of the SARS outbreak was contained.

Being a member of the international community, we did not hold back any of our information about SARS. The world was alerted of the new epidemic. Our research findings were shared with the rest of the world, cooperation enhanced and medical research accelerated. Our world citizenship stood the test of time.

4. Ways to Promote the Fighting Spirit Against SARS

4.1 In the fight against SARS, a disease which we know so little about, Hong Kong people have demonstrated their good sense, professionalism, care and concern. These unique qualities are essential for revitalising our city. We must treasure these qualities as they have brought about the spiritual awakening of the community at the cost of lives. To survive in adversities, including epidemic diseases, and to sustain the development of our city, we must promote the spirit that Hong Kong demonstrated in the fight against SARS. For the betterment of our society, this prized spirit could be commemorated and maintained by either one or a combination of the followings -

(a) A Memorial Day

We can set aside a day for community activities to commemorate the event. Activities such as a territory-wide cleaning campaign can be held on that day to remind people of the importance of public hygiene.

(b) A Monument or Memorial Building

A monument may be erected to commemorate the SARS victims and the noble spirit shown by members of the public in the fight against SARS.

It is also proposed to construct a building or a park to commemorate the event. In the planning stage, an open competition can be held to encourage various sectors of the community, especially students, to participate.

(c) Records

There have been many touching stories and heroic deeds in the community since the outbreak of SARS. These stories and

deeds, which fully manifest the noble and selfless spirit of members of our community, can be recorded in the following ways :

(i) To record the events for reference by future generations
Books, documentaries, VCDs and works of art can be produced to record the events and let our future generations and people from the rest of the world know of the extraordinary deeds done by ordinary people in the fight against SARS. Other activities such as workshops and essay competitions can also be organised to recount the touching stories of people from all walks of life.

(ii) To set up galleries in museums dedicated to the fight against SARS

It is suggested that a gallery be set up in the Hong Kong Museum of History or the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in recognition of the concerted efforts of the community in the fight against SARS. It is also proposed from the medical perspective that the outbreak of SARS be analysed and illustrated in the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, with highlights of the selfless deeds and the research achievements of our medical workers.

(d) Naming

To pay tribute to those medical and health care workers who sacrificed their lives in the course of duty and persons who have made significant contributions to the fight against SARS, we can name hospitals, parks, streets, pavilions or other buildings after them.

(e) Setting up Scholarships and Trust Funds

Scholarships and trust funds can be set up to promote medical research and encourage our younger generations to join the health care profession. They may also be named after those medical and health care workers who sacrificed their lives in the course of duty and persons who have made significant contributions to the fight against SARS.

(f) Commendations and Honours

In the fight against SARS, many people in the frontline health care services, medical research and community services have made significant contributions. Some of them have even

sacrificed their lives. Their selflessness, and the care and compassion that they have for others are indeed praiseworthy and commendable.

There are different ways of awarding commendations and honours. One alternative is to adopt the existing system for commendations and honours which the public is familiar with. This will also help maintain the authority of the existing system. On the other hand, in view of the special nature of the SARS outbreak, we can also introduce a new commendation and award mechanism for the purpose.

5. The Timing of the Commemoration

5.1 Members of the Committee held different views on the timing of the commemoration. As the number of new cases has continued to drop and “zero infection” and “zero death” have been recorded, some considered that it was time to prepare for the commemoration when the public still had a fresh memory of the event, and that commemorative activities could be launched once the disease had been further contained. On the other hand, some members held that it was too early to launch the commemorative activities when the disease had not yet been substantially contained and there was still a risk of another major outbreak.

5.2 To conclude, it is the right time now to start discussing and soliciting views on the issue so that we can be ready for the activities when the time comes. Since certain tasks, such as erecting monuments, constructing pavilions and memorial parks, etc., will take time to complete, different commemorative activities can be held as and when ready.

6. Consultation

6.1 We are well aware that the public will have different views on the issue. Hence, in drawing up our recommendations, we will take into full account the views collected from the public during the consultation period. As our intention is to perpetuate this collective memory for the betterment of our society, it is most important that consensus can be reached on the matter.

6.2 If you have any comments regarding this consultative paper, please forward them to Home Affairs Bureau by any of the following

means on or before 10 July 2003 -

By post : Home Affairs Bureau
8th Floor, West Wing
Central Government Offices
11 Ice House Street
Hong Kong

By fax : 2537 6319

Access our website at : www.fight-sars.gov.hk¹

E-mail address : fight-sars@hab.gov.hk

6.3 For enquiries, please contact Home Affairs Bureau at 2810 3115.

Home Affairs Bureau
18 June 2003

¹ Before 22 June 2003, please access the webpage through <http://www.info.gov.hk/hab/fight-sars.htm>

**Advisory Committee on the
Promotion of the Fighting Spirit against SARS**

Membership List

Chairman

Dr. Patrick HO, JP Secretary for Home Affairs

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Dr. CHAN Man-hung

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The Hon JAO Tsung-I, GBM

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Dr. Rosanna WONG, DBE, JP

Mr. Raymond Roy WONG, SBS

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Terms of Reference

- To identify the community's spirit and values made explicit in the fight against SARS;
- Record these spirit and values so that they may be kept for generations to come;
- Study the form of memorials or activities to commemorate the event so that these values will be preserved;
- Through consultation, allow representatives from all walks of life to express their opinions, to overcome anxiety, to resume confidence and to strengthen the community link.