

Press Releases

LCQ14: Police render assistance to ethnic minorities

Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Ambrose S K Lee, to a question by the Hon Emily Lau on the police's measures to assist ethnic minorities in the Legislative Council today (March 12):

Question:

On February 12 this year, I, together with a number of representatives from human rights and minority interests concern groups, had a meeting with the senior management of the Police to reflect the problems encountered by the ethnic minorities in their contacts with the Police. In this connection, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

(a) given that the Police advised at the above meeting that 73 measures had been implemented since 2006 to assist the ethnic minorities, whether the authorities can set out the details and implementation date of each of these measures, and when the effectiveness of these measures will be assessed;

(b) in the past three years, of the respective numbers of cases involving the ethnic minorities assisting the Police in investigations or seeking help from the Police in which interpreters proficient in Cantonese and Japanese, Cantonese and Urdu, Cantonese and Hindi, Cantonese and Tagalog, Cantonese and Indonesian, Cantonese and Nepali, English and Japanese, English and Urdu, English and Hindi, English and Tagalog, English and Indonesian, and English and Nepali were required to help the ethnic minorities concerned to communicate with police officers, and the number of such cases in which the Police did not provide the interpretation service required;

(c) whether measures are in place to ensure that interpreters can arrive within 30 minutes to provide interpretation service; and whether they have drawn up guidelines and provided training to the interpreters to ensure that the interpretation service provided by them is accurate, free of personal opinions and unbiased;

(d) whether the Police will, after taking statements at police stations from the ethnic minorities who assist the Police in investigations or seek help from the Police, take the initiative to provide them with copies of such statements written in their native languages or English; if so, of the implementation date of such a measure; if not, the reasons for that; and

(e) whether measures are in place to ensure that front-line police officers' ability to investigate cases involving ethnic minorities or to assist them will not be affected by the fact that the officers are illiterate in languages other than Chinese; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The "Working Group to Address the Concerns of Ethnic Minorities" of the Police is responsible for co-ordinating and bringing together efforts of the Force in enhancing communication and liaison with the ethnic minorities.

Over the years, having regard to the specific circumstances of individual districts, the Police Districts have implemented a total

of 73 measures at the district level to enhance communication and liaison with the ethnic minorities, and through this to engage the ethnic minority communities to participate in the fight against crime. Although the measures implemented in different districts vary, they can broadly be categorised into three main areas:

(i) to work together with non-governmental organisations and other government departments in establishing liaison networks with the ethnic minority communities; and to enhance communication and close liaison with the ethnic minority bodies through meetings and experience-sharing with district organisations and livelihood bodies of different ethnic minorities (27 measures in total);

(ii) to organise different types of activities for ethnic minority communities, including visits to Police facilities; and organisation of short-term courses, talks and promotional activities, etc. These activities aim to facilitate the ethnic minorities' understanding of the community they live in, enhance their understanding of the work and law enforcement functions of the Police, and encourage them to participate in fight crime initiatives (28 measures in total); and

(iii) to maintain close liaison with schools with ethnic minority students, and invite the ethnic minority students to join the Junior Police Call, with a view to facilitating their integration into the community and enhancing their understanding of the work of the Police Force (18 measures in total).

Apart from the district-based measures mentioned above, the Police have also implemented the following measures at the central level to address the needs of the ethnic minorities:

(i) two commonly used forms and documents (namely the "Notice of Rights to Persons Detained in Custody by the Police" and the "Personal Information Collection Statement") have been translated into nine languages (i.e. Tagalog, Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian, Hindi, Mongolian, Nepali, Tamil and Urdu) for use in all police stations;

(ii) the Police are making arrangements to form a specialised cadre responsible for ethnic minorities affairs, so as to enhance the capability of those Police Districts with a larger ethnic minorities population in dealing with matters related to ethnic minorities. Members of the cadre will be representatives from the Districts concerned. Through experience-sharing and training, their understanding of the cultures of different ethnic groups will be enhanced. Members of the cadre will also become the designated officers in their respective Police Districts responsible for ethnic minority affairs. This will ensure that ethnic minority affairs in the Districts concerned could be handled more effectively in future; and

(iii) Police Districts are encouraged to recruit ethnic minorities as volunteers, e.g. to assist at the Police Information Booths in major crowd management operations of the Police, so as to enhance the communication and co-ordination between the Police and different ethnic minorities.

The Force's "Working Group to Address the Concerns of Ethnic Minorities" meets regularly to review the progress and effectiveness of the initiatives, and to continue to formulate feasible measures to further assist the ethnic minorities as necessary.

(b) According to the statistics provided by the Police, from 2005 to 2007, the numbers of cases involving ethnic minorities assisting the Police in investigations or seeking help from the Police in which the assistance of interpreters proficient in Japanese, Urdu, Hindi, Tagalog, Indonesian or Nepali were required are as follows:

Language	Number of cases
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Japanese	473
Urdu	1,385
Hindi	500
Tagalog	2,891
Indonesian	3,505
Nepali	2,590

Statistics are kept based on the languages spoken by the ethnic minorities concerned. We do not have further breakdowns as to whether the recipients of the interpretation service on the other side speak English or Cantonese. The Police provided the interpretation services required in all of the above cases.

(c) The Police provide the necessary interpretation services to the ethnic minorities through different means. In general, when it is necessary to provide interpretation service (including interpretation service on the six languages mentioned in part (b) of the question) to a member of the ethnic minorities, the Police will invite part-time foreign language interpreters registered with the Court Language Section of the Judiciary Administration to assist. These interpreters are generally required to attain the required qualification and level of language skill before they can be registered with the Judiciary.

When a police officer on duty needs interpretation service in dealing with ethnic minorities, he will immediately inform the respective Regional Command and Control Centre. The Centre will immediately contact the part-time interpreters to arrange for attendance at the scene as soon as possible to provide interpretation service. Since the time required by the interpreters to arrive at the scene depends on various circumstantial factors, the Police have not set any time limit for the interpreters to arrive at the scene.

(d) To ensure the validity of any statement recorded, all interviews with ethnic minorities by police officers must be conducted in the mother tongue of the interviewees unless the interviewees prefer to use another language. The statement must also be recorded in the mother language of the interviewees. Where a statement is recorded in a language other than English, the Police will provide a copy of the English translation of the statement to the interviewee on request.

Regarding the provision of copies of the statement taken to the interviewees, where the statement taken is a caution statement, the Police will provide a copy of the statement of their own accord; where the statement is not a caution statement, the Police will provide a copy if requested by the individual concerned.

(e) The Force makes appropriate arrangement in staff deployment in accordance with the language proficiency of the police officers concerned. Officers who are more conversant in English will be deployed to posts which require a better command of the language (e.g. duties in the Report Rooms). When a frontline officer encounters difficulty in communicating with an individual who does not speak Chinese, he will seek assistance from the console or his supervisor, as appropriate. The Force will send an interpreter or an officer who is conversant in the language to the scene to assist in the handling of the case.

Moreover, as mentioned in my answer to part (a) of the

question, the Police have translated two commonly used forms and documents into a number of languages for use in all police stations. Based on their specific circumstances, individual Police Districts may also provide to ethnic minorities translation of other information or forms in other languages. The Force is now examining the possibility of providing standardised translation of more forms for use in all Police Districts.

The Force will continue to facilitate exchanges between police officers and ethnic minority communities at district level (including making arrangement for police officers to participate in their activities and to learn their languages) so as to further enhance the mutual understanding and communication between the Police and the ethnic minorities.

Ends/Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Issued at HKT 16:10

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