

## Unison pins reform hope on city's next chief

Rights group delays suing government, as it holds talks with candidates on education for minorities

A group advocating **ethnic minorities'** rights has decided to postpone its lawsuit against the Education Bureau, pending the election of Hong Kong's next chief executive.

Unison, which demanded that the government provide Chinese-language training to minority students, said it would hold off legal action as it waited for the city's next elected leader to address the issue.

However, the group said it had a "disappointing" meeting with Chief Secretary Stephen Lam Sui-lung and the bureau yesterday, in which the officials "only repeated the government line".

"We are very disappointed," said Fermi Wong Wai-fun, Unison's executive director. "We expected that Lam, as the chief secretary, could exercise his power to do something.

"But regrettably he just agreed to what the Education Bureau had said," Wong said.

"If an organisation keeps speaking the same thing for a decade, there must be a point, so why don't they listen?"

Unison contends that Chinese-language lessons are essential for **ethnic minorities** to integrate in Hong Kong society.

Wong said if negotiations with the authorities failed, the group would lodge a case before the Equal Opportunities Commission in six months.

It is also considering a judicial review, but will wait for the next chief executive to respond to its demands.

Unison representatives recently met chief executive hopeful Henry Tang Ying-yen and are due to speak to rival candidate Leung Chun-ying next month.

The chief executive election will be held in March.

Wong said Tang, Lam's immediate predecessor as chief secretary, had given the organisation a positive answer.

However, Lam's office said the government had done enough to advance minorities' rights.

The organisation yesterday criticised Lam for "only repeating the old government line".

Rihana Shaheen, a 23-year-old university student who is also a representative of Unison, said: "They are just bouncing back everything we [have] said. They insisted that what they are doing is good enough."

Another representative, 22-year-old Roy Umar Aftab, said: "They should at least listen and consider our suggestions."

Unison says there are more than 14,000 non-Chinese-speaking ethnic minority students in Hong Kong.

Cheung Kwok-che, a social welfare-sector legislator, who has also expressed concerns over unequal educational opportunities for the city's **ethnic minorities**, admitted that a legal challenge could be difficult because the group's argument was not clear-cut.

Bringing the authorities to court would be a lengthy process and would require testimony from concerned minorities, he said.

The arguments are likely to revolve around whether the government has provided adequate measures to help **ethnic minorities** - a question open to debate.

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Ada Lee and Dennis Chong



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