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UN faults school policy as ‘de facto discrimination’

Segregation of Hong Kong’s *ethnic-minority* students in specific schools is “de facto discrimination” and should stop, a United Nations committee says.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child called on the government to “urgently abolish” the so-called designated schools and use the resources to promote *minority* children’s access to mainstream schools.

Releasing its conclusions after last month’s hearing on Hong Kong’s implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the committee also expressed regret at what it terms the city’s lack of a comprehensive policy and strategy on children.

Campaigner Fermi Wong Wai-fun urged the Equal Opportunities Commission to launch an investigation.

“It is a very strong tone for the report to confirm the existence of ‘de facto discrimination’,” Wong, of *minority*-rights group Unison, said.

“Various bureaus are shirking the responsibility of racial segregation in schools.”

Of 852 government schools, 31 enrol mostly *ethnic* minorities and teach limited Chinese.

The government earlier said the label “designated schools” was removed this year.

Minorities and their supporters say the system limits the children’s learning of Chinese and condemns them to low-paid jobs.

The government has previously claimed any racial segregation that might appear in the schools is a result of parental choice.

But the UN committee said parents’ choice was limited by the possible exclusion faced by their non-Chinese children in mainstream schools that did not cater to their special needs.

Other “regrets” expressed by the committee concerned the government’s inaction to implement the UN’s previous recommendations on child protection.

In response, a government spokeswoman said: “Additional resources have been allocated to ... explore stepping up support for the non-Chinese speaking students to enhance their learning of the Chinese language.”

Democratic Party chairwoman Emily Lau Wai-hing, who attended the two-day hearings in Geneva, Switzerland, will file an oral question about the report in the Legislative Council tomorrow. “A lot of problems are highlighted by the report,” Lau said yesterday.

Seven groups that aid children said they would meet with the related bureaus and the Equal Opportunities Commission to push the government for policy improvements.

Equal Opportunities Commissioner Dr York Chow Yat-ngok last month said he might launch a probe on the city’s education policy for *ethnic* minorities after Unison said it would sue the government for breaching anti-discrimination laws.

EDUCATION

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