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## **Majority must care about minority rights in healthy democracy**

While many in Hong Kong are fighting for a democratic political system, it's important to remember the core values of a democracy when considering the discrimination law review of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

In a democracy, precisely because every member of society has a say in policy, it is all the more important for all to abide by the principle of equality. Only when the majority cares about minority rights can we run our society based on justice rather than self-interest. Equality is a fundamental principle of a democracy with the rule of law; therefore, just discrimination law is very important.

There are widespread rumours online that Hongkongers will become second-class citizens under the commission's discrimination law review. Many people have suddenly become concerned about this law review because of misinterpreted information. On the other hand, many vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, are treated as second-class citizens every day.

Part of this treatment arises from flaws in the Race Discrimination Ordinance; therefore, Hong Kong Unison supports proposals of the commission that will rectify these flaws. For example, regarding nationality, citizenship and residence status discrimination, for years many ethnic minority Hong Kong permanent residents have faced difficulties opening bank accounts just because they hold passports of certain countries. The Basic Law provides that only permanent residents have the right to vote and stand for elections, and this will not be overridden by the ordinance. Also, it is possible to have exemptions relating to social welfare and government functions such as housing, education and social security, but each exemption must be legitimate, reasonable and proportional.

Civic participation is after all about making decisions with people who are different from us. It is important for members of the public to try to put themselves in the shoes of those in vulnerable groups and make submissions to the commission that are based on justice and protecting minority rights.

We hope that through this public consultation, the public will better understand the difficulties faced by vulnerable groups and thereby strengthen our core values including justice, equality and empathy and develop Hong Kong into a healthy democracy.

**Annie Li**, campaign officer, Hong Kong Unison

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