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## UN criticism can't be ignored, say activists

NGO representatives hail rights committee's comments on the treatment of minorities

Increasingly harsh criticism by a United Nations rights watchdog of Hong Kong's treatment of minorities will be hard for the government to ignore, activists say.

They were speaking a day after the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights accused Hong Kong of not upholding human rights and failing to prevent discrimination.

The committee's latest observations were harsher than its previous remarks, Human Rights Monitor director Law Yuk-kai said yesterday.

"With Hong Kong's wealth, affluence and developed status, there were a lot of expectations that these rights would be upheld. So to find that the marginalised and the poor were routinely ignored and oppressed made it unacceptable," Law said.

The criticism came in concluding observations issued on Tuesday after a meeting of the committee in Geneva last week.

Annie Li Man, campaign manager with minority rights group *Unison* HK said the recommendations were getting "more and more concrete".

"It will be harder for the government to shirk its duty or write it off with half-hearted programmes," she said.

She said the report specifically told the government to establish a good Chinese-as-a-second-language framework.

"We worry about the framework the government promised," Li said of the government's plans to introduce such classes in secondary schools. "It's due to be implemented in September but we've heard no details at all. We wonder if it's ready."

*Unison* would accept only a well-planned curriculum with the aim of helping non-Chinese-speaking students to reach the level of local students, she said.

It would need to come complete with a clear curriculum and target goals for students, a set of assessment tools, teaching materials and teacher training.

In response, an Education Bureau spokeswoman said more details of the framework would be made available late next month. She said officials had offered to discuss the framework at a **Unison** round table earlier this year, but had been rejected.

The committee also noted that despite claims the government had got rid of "designated" schools catering for minorities, de facto segregation still existed as over 60 per cent of minority students were congregated in a handful of schools. Li said the government should take the initiative to help ethnic minority students access other schools.

Law said the report asked multiple times for laws on discrimination. "They are not trusting the government, so legislation is needed to ensure rights are upheld, and there is a way to keep the government accountable."

HUMAN RIGHTS

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**Jennifer Ngo**  
jennifer.ngo@scmp.com

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