

Social Welfare Department
9/F., Wu Chung House
213 Queen's Road East
Wanchai
Hong Kong

Attn. Director of Social Welfare

By email

15 March 2017

Dear Ms. Carol Yip,

Ref: ISS-HK demand to sign new consent forms

We are the Refugee Union, the only refugee-led society in Hong Kong comprising a community of ethnically and religiously diverse refugees. Our main objective is to safeguard the rights and interests of people who claim asylum here, and therefore have the right to be protected and duly assisted while their claims are being assessed and determined by the government.

The Refugee Union received numerous complaints that we refugees are forced to sign a new consent form by the government contractor ISS-HK when we visit their offices for monthly contract renewals. In particular, many of our members complain that they have been told their assistance will be discontinued should they refuse to sign such consent form, the meaning of which is not entirely clear.

Some refugees report being told by caseworkers that this is a new form required in reference to the new tender effective 1 February 2017. Others report they were told that ISS need to cooperate with other institutional as well as non-governmental bodies, with which it would share or from whom it would collect information. Either reasons are unsatisfactory.

Concerning to the refugee community is not the new consent form per se, which may be understandable. Rather, we would draw your attention to the fact that this consent form is drafted in such a way that, first, it is not readable for many of our members, who rightly demanded a copy to obtain independent legal advice.

Second, that this form requires refugees to relinquish their right to privacy to such an extent that it is dangerous for refugees. It is to be reminded that refugees are in many cases in the process to have their asylum claims assessed, that to collect information from or share it with “any appropriate sources”, “family members” and “related professional organizations”, among others, without these being clearly identified, may be tantamount to a “death sentence” for many of our members. The sources the ISS is requesting to share information with or collect it from may very well be involved with or responsible for the very threats refugees are escaping.

The Refugee Union believes it is unacceptable to demand that refugees sign such consent forms, and that those who fail to collaborate are then threatened with the termination of assistance.

In this light, we demand an explanation to the need for ISS-HK to collect from or share information about refugees with so many unidentified parties without restrictions.

Secondly, we demand that refugees are provided with copies of everything they are required to sign, and that we can take these forms with us to read them carefully at our own pace or to obtain legal advice if necessary. That ISS-HK already refused to provide copies of signed consent forms is entirely unacceptable.

Finally it is to be noted that the consent refugees are asked to give ISS-HK is open ended and does not indicate a timeframe during which the data collection and sharing is agreed upon.

The Refugee Union is greatly disturbed by this document presented as some ordinary policy requirements, which may significantly jeopardize our personal security.

We invite those responsible for this policy to promptly review its structure and deployment.

Yours faithfully,

Refugee Union