

International Social Service

6/F, 130 Hennessy Road,
Wan Chai
Hong Kong

13 February 2017

Attn. Managing Director.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Urgent demand of vital information and increase of welfare assistance for refugees

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.

We meet today to demand that International Social Service (ISS) stop the unreasonable request of forcing refugees to obtain a guarantor in order to be afforded rental assistance. The Refugee Union has collected innumerable complaints from the refugee community evidencing that the demand for rent guarantors is causing families and individuals to lose their homes at rental contract renewal. As of consequence, many refugees are becoming homeless.

We understand from the media that ISS sympathizes with the “difficulty refugees may have in obtaining a local guarantor, and that guarantors overseas such as friends or family back home, and guarantees from organizations are also accepted. The policy has always been in place, and the purpose is to give assurance to landlords”.

We thereby ask ISS to urgently reply to the following:

1. If this policy has “always been in place”, why wasn’t it implemented before?
2. It is doubtful that landlords with whom we rent rooms suddenly ask for a document to prove we can pay the rent. Did our landlords ask for such guarantees? How and who was involved in devising this policy?
3. If the purpose of this policy is to ease concerns of landlords, who might not rent their properties to refugees in view of ISS insufficient rental assistance, how will a guarantor letter produced in a developing country ease their concerns? What mechanisms are in

place for landlords to obtain such rental balances? Will they travel to Africa and South Asia to retrieve outstanding funds?

4. If local guarantees are accepted, and these organizations sign letters for thousands of refugees, worth hundreds of thousands dollars in total, what steps will ISS take to ensure these organizations are able to pay such balances in years to come?
5. If guarantor letters from overseas are acceptable, why do refugees complain that they are required by caseworkers to produce a guarantor who lives in Hong Kong, with local ID card? Are caseworkers misinterpreting or misapplying this policy?
6. Finally, if ISS understands and sympathize with the difficulties refugees face, and perhaps is aware of the fact that by denying rental assistance to those who cannot provide guarantor letters is effectively causing some refugees to lose their homes and live on the streets, or commit crimes, **why does ISS insist on maintaining this policy?**

We respectfully demand that ISS put an end to requiring guarantor letters. This “policy” is tantamount to protecting the government coffers while blaming refugees for our poverty, which is augmented, if not caused by the long waits we face in Hong Kong concomitant with a ban on raising any income.

Respectfully,

Refugee Union