

HONG KONG

Asia's world city

January 2007

A Free Society, Accountable Government

Hong Kong's Basic Law guarantees the fundamental rights of residents, including :

- Equality before the law
- To vote and stand for election
- Private ownership of property
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of the press
- Freedom of assembly
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom of religious belief
- Freedom of marriage
- Freedom of academic research

Hong Kong is a free and open society. The community cherishes its rights and freedoms, which are deeply rooted in the rule of law.

Hong Kong people are quick to speak out if they believe these freedoms or rights are under threat. They understand that past and future success depends on safeguarding the freedoms and institutions that have made Hong Kong a major hub for

international business, finance, trade, transport, communications and tourism.

One of the most vital ingredients has been a fast, free and unfettered flow of information coupled with a robust and vibrant media. Hong Kong people have a voracious appetite for news and information. A total of 48 newspapers and nearly 700 periodicals are printed daily or weekly.

Almost 100 international media organisations have offices in Hong Kong, which is the base for a number of regional publications or editions such as *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times*, *USA Today International* and *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*. Hong Kong is the regional base for Time Warner and CNN International.

There are nearly 180 Internet Service Providers in Hong Kong. Internet content is not censored or edited by government agencies.

A level playing field ensures that businesses can compete equally and freely on the basis of their merits

and strengths. Foreign businesses are treated the same way as local businesses. There are no restrictions on ownership of property.

The free movement of goods and capital has been central to Hong Kong's success as an international financial centre. There are no restrictions on the amount of money allowed into or out of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong dollar is freely convertible. Gold, silver, securities, and real estate are traded freely without any foreign ownership restrictions.

Hong Kong is one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities, where East and West have blended to produce a vibrant, outward-looking and tolerant society. The vast majority of the population is Chinese, mostly Cantonese, but there are more than 530,000 expatriates living in Hong Kong, with large groups from the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, the UK and other European countries. There are more than 290,000 expatriates from the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, most of whom work as domestic helpers.

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There is a sizeable Indian community, many of whose members have been in Hong Kong for generations and have thrived as traders and merchants.

The Nepali community traces its origins to the stationing of Gurkha troops in Hong Kong from the early 1960s to 1997.

With such a diversity of races comes a diversity of religions. Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism are among the faiths practised in Hong Kong. Residents worship in complete freedom. Incidents of religious intolerance are virtually unheard of in Hong Kong.

The Executive Authorities

The Hong Kong SAR Government is headed by the Chief Executive, who is assisted in policy making by the Executive Council. Its members are appointed by the Chief Executive from among the Government's principal officials, members of the legislature and leading public figures.

To enhance the accountability of the Government, a ministerial system was introduced in 2002. This has more clearly defined the roles, powers and responsibilities of top government officials and preserved the permanent, meritocratic, professional and politically neutral civil service.

Under the system, the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Financial Secretary, the Secretary for Justice and

Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China on July 1, 1997.

Under the unique concept of 'One Country, Two Systems', Hong Kong's economic and social systems have remained basically unchanged. Hong Kong people are running Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy promised in the Basic Law, the SAR's constitutional document.

The Hong Kong SAR is authorised to exercise executive, legislative and independent judicial power.

The Government, headed by the Chief Executive, is the executive authority of the SAR.

The Legislative Council passes laws, approves taxation and public expenditure and monitors the performance of the administration.

The judiciary remains independent to administer justice and protect the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong people, while the courts interpret the laws.

Directors of Bureaux are no longer civil servants but are appointed on contract terms so they can assume political responsibility for their portfolios.

The Legislature

The 60-member Legislative Council is constituted by elections. The most recent elections were held in September 2004, at which 30 members were returned by direct election in geographical constituencies and 30 by functional constituencies (representing various sectors or professions).

The Legislative Council is composed of Chinese citizens who are permanent residents of Hong Kong with no right of abode in a foreign country. However, up to one-fifth of the members can be foreign nationals or Chinese people holding the right of abode in a foreign country, provided they are permanent residents of Hong Kong.

An Efficiency Unit established in 1992 acts as a consulting partner for all government bureaux and departments, providing strategic solutions for its clients as they seek to deliver world-class, people-based public services.