

June 11, 2026

The Editor
Agence France-Presse

Dear Editor,

In relation to the article entitled “‘Shoebox’ flat reform leaves low-income Hong Kong residents in limbo” by Catherine Lai published on May 28, 2026, we would like to make the following clarifications.

The current-term Hong Kong SAR Government is resolutely determined to tackle the long-standing, big and difficult issue of substandard subdivided units (SDUs) in Hong Kong. Since taking office in July 2022, we have been substantially increasing the supply of public housing by enhancing quantity, speed, efficiency and quality. Coupled with the launch of the innovative initiative of Light Public Housing (LPH) – which utilises the Modular Integrated Construction (MiC) method to quickly construct some 30 000 units within four years’ time during 2023 to 2027 – the total public housing supply will reach around 196 000 units in the coming five years (i.e. 2026-27 to 2030-31). This represents an increase of more than 80% public housing production compared to the five-year period at the time of the current-term Government took office (i.e. 2022-23 to 2026-27). Notably, the latest quarterly composite waiting time for public rental housing has dropped to 4.7 years, a significant decrease of 1.4 years from its peak of 6.1 years before the current-term Government took office in July 2022, marking the lowest record in some eight years. All these efforts have helped SDU households waiting for public rental housing (PRH) (i.e. some 40% of the existing SDU households according to our studies) to be housed to public housing much more quickly. This enhanced public housing support is essential as we tackle the issue of substandard SDUs in a comprehensive and orderly manner.

It is indeed not uncommon in major cities of advanced economies worldwide for residential flats to be subdivided into multiple smaller units (commonly known as SDUs in Hong Kong) for letting out to meet the housing needs of different citizens. Various forms of regulated shared tenancy housing exist globally, particularly in cities with relatively high rental level. Such types of housing can cater to individuals working or studying in urban centres seeking convenient locations or facing financial constraints, such as “Class A Multiple Dwellings” in New York, “houses in multiple occupation” in England, and “multi-tenant houses” in Toronto. Hong Kong is no exception to this global phenomenon.

After years of development, the quality of SDUs in Hong Kong varies greatly in terms of living conditions – some of them are of higher standards, providing a more affordable housing option for white-collar workers, young families and university students with preference for convenient commute; while some SDUs are associated with problems such as poor hygiene, fire risks, structural safety hazards and cramped spaces, drawing widespread public concerns. The Government has made ongoing endeavours to improve the living conditions of SDU grassroot tenants, including introducing Community Living Rooms in different districts to provide additional space (such as kitchen, study area, activity rooms, etc.) for SDU families, as well as implementing tenancy control on SDUs to provide protection to tenants (such as ensuring a total of

four years of guaranteed tenure for SDU tenancies, limiting rental increase by 10% upon renewal of SDU tenancies, etc.). Nevertheless, after years of accumulation of the issue of substandard SDUs, we have come to a critical point, and our community has reached undisputed consensus that substandard SDUs have to be eradicated in order to improve the living conditions of grassroot citizens in a timely and orderly manner.

Against the above backdrop and with the ultimate goal of eradicating substandard SDUs in a gradual manner, the current-term Government, as a breakthrough, has rolled out the new Basic Housing Unit (BHU) regime starting from March 1, 2026 under the principle of “registration first, enforcement later”, with applications for registration of pre-existing SDUs, as well as applications for BHU recognition of SDUs complying with minimum standards of living conditions being accepted concurrently. The regime requires SDUs to meet eight aspects of minimum standards (i.e. minimum area, minimum height, fire safety, structural safety, separate toilet, water supply requirements, lighting and ventilation, as well as separate water and electricity meters) and obtain BHU recognition before legally let out for habitation. In devising the BHU regime, we have made reference to the prevailing regulations on shared tenancy housing in other jurisdictions, including the minimum requirements of living conditions, licensing arrangements, associated offences, etc.

Under the BHU regime, there is a 48-month transitional arrangement (i.e. a 12-month registration period followed by a 36-month grace period upon successful registration) to allow reasonable time for SDU owners/operators to gradually adapt to the statutory requirements, including arranging their tenancies and alteration works in a flexible and people-oriented manner. Flats that have been successfully registered and obtained a grace period can continue to be let out under their pre-existing tenancies until the grace period expires (i.e. on or before February 28, 2030). In other words, the Government is not demanding immediate compliance; rather, we are ensuring that owners and operators have ample time to adapt and renovate their flats. As such, there is no absolute urgency at the current initial stage for owners/operators to ask tenants to vacate their SDUs.

Meanwhile, the criminal offence of illegal letting of SDUs with no registration and no recognition under the BHU regime will only come into effect 12 months after the commencement of the regime (i.e. effective from March 1, 2027), we will adopt a pragmatic, people-oriented and risk-based approach when taking enforcement actions so as to ensure that SDU households will not be displaced.

Recognising that some SDU owners and tenants may need to discuss rental arrangements for various reasons, our six District Service Teams (DSTs) have geared up to render immediate assistance to any affected tenants. In fact, since commencing operations in early 2022, DSTs have been continuously assisting households in need to apply for traditional PRH, LPH, the Government-led transitional housing (TH), Hostels for Single Persons, or find other accommodation, etc. Furthermore, we proactively identify target buildings with SDUs that may soon undergo alteration works using various intelligence channels, and accord priority in arranging preventive home visits by DSTs to these buildings, providing comprehensive support to households in need as early as possible.

Furthermore, we would like to clarify a point mentioned in the article regarding the

Society for Community Organisation (SoCO)’s statement that “around 300 households [are] threatened with forcible eviction” from SDUs. Following our communication with SoCO via DST in March this year and as stated in SoCO’s press release published on March 24, 2026¹, the figure of “around 300 households” should be referring to cumulative cases that SoCO has engaged over time, and many of which have been proactively followed up by DSTs and successfully rehoused in various housing resources. According to our official records, since the roll-out of the BHU regime to mid-May 2026, our DSTs received 35 cases from different buildings where individual SDU households were asked by their landlords to vacate within a short period. DSTs have assisted 10 such households in need to apply for TH, while the remaining 25 cases are being proactively followed up to ensure relevant tenants will not be displaced.

Lastly, the so-called “coffin homes” and other small bedspaces are generally subject to the regulation under the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance (Cap. 447) enacted in 1994 to ensure safety standards and sanitary provisions. Strict enforcement action is taken against unlicensed bedspace apartments by our Home Affairs Department.

Should the media and members of the public require any official information regarding the BHU regime or wish to understand the support available for SDU tenants, please contact us or our six DSTs² instead of using information provided by some unreliable sources.

Winnie Ho Wing-yin
 Secretary for Housing
 The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

(ENDS)

¹ <https://soco.org.hk/156266/> (Chinese version only)

² The coverage of the six Subdivided Unit District Service Teams are as follows:

NGO	Service Region	Service District (based on District Council boundaries)
New Home Association Hong Kong Island Service Centre	Hong Kong Island	Central & Western, Eastern, Southern and Wan Chai
Y.T.M. Concern For Livelihood Association	Kowloon West (1)	Yau Tsim Mong
Hong Kong Single Parents Association	Kowloon West (2)	Sham Shui Po
New Home Association Kowloon West Service Centre	Kowloon Central & East	Kowloon City, Wong Tai Sin and Kwun Tong
New Territories Association of Societies (Community Services) Foundation	New Territories West	Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing and Islands
Shatin Inhabitants Association	New Territories East	Tai Po, North, Sai Kung and Sha Tin