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**Speech by the Hon Mrs Selina Chow Liang Shuk-Yee, GBS,  
JP**

**Motion Debate on Legislating Against Racial Discrimination,  
12 March 2003**



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Selina Chow:

Madam President, I would like to thank Ms Emily LAU for clarifying the position of the Liberal Party. We can hardly blame Mr Albert HO for misunderstanding our position, because in fact we did raise opposition in this Chamber before. But we did not oppose taking actions to address discrimination. What we opposed was legislation. In fact, we expressed concern over legislation then, for we were worried that suppressing or controlling culture or thoughts by means of law might give rise to other problems. But insofar as we can see it, nothing serious has happened since the enactment of legislation against discrimination on other grounds. Moreover, I personally have changed my view over this issue in recent years and now, I do consider such legislation necessary. On the one hand, as Ms Audrey EU has said, perhaps I am now engaged in tourism and so, I feel that being an international city, Hong Kong must give the impression that we are very open. On the other hand, I have collected some cases, although they are not in a large number. In 2002, five complaints were lodged by tourists, two of which being against hotels, two against catering establishments and one against impolite treatment on entry into the territory.

I would like to speak with reference to the Government, and as the Secretary is here in the Chamber, perhaps he can consider my views. While officers of the Immigration Department have been working very competently and efficiently, I am sorry to say that they have nevertheless treated some inbound visitors from foreign countries rather impolitely, making these visitors feel that they are not welcome here. Recently, the Consul General of Malaysia told me in person that Malaysians whose names bear the word "bin" are subject to stringent interrogation when they come to Hong Kong. Besides, a number of colleagues also said earlier that Indians often encounter difficulties when they arrive. This is so even for people who are famous, and Members may have read reports about their cases in South China Morning Post. Even though they made it clear that they come here to attend meetings, they still encountered problems. Why did the immigration officers not make phone calls to verify their claims? Why must they interrogate these visitors for an hour or two? Such cases may be few and far between. But this is simply unnecessary, because by doing a little bit more, we can clear ourselves of the impression of being racist.

When Ms Audrey EU first proposed this motion, and as soon as we read

that it was about racial discrimination, a consensus was already reached within my Party that we need to participate in this debate. I would like to talk about my personal experience. My daughter told me that when she was in Singapore, she found that Hong Kong was in fact very backward. In Singapore, she did not feel any racial discrimination at all, because in Singapore, even one single sentence can be expressed in four languages. Perhaps we may sneer at them, but this actually shows that they are very open, and this also demonstrates the determination of the Singaporean Government. Whether it be the media, television stations or other broadcasting media, all use several languages. The Singaporean Government uses the languages of different ethnic groups, regardless of the population share of each ethnic group (the Chinese should be the largest ethnic community) and attaches equal importance to all of these languages. Policy-wise, they are able to avoid ill feelings among different races. Hong Kong has always claimed to be an international metropolis and vowed to compete with others, seeing Singapore as our strongest rival. Singapore gives the impression that racial discrimination does not exist at all. In Hong Kong, however, we are unable to remove the ill feelings and barriers that exist among different races. Let us not talk about the new arrivals. Even foreigners who have lived here for a long time still have this feeling. I believe Hong Kong, being an advanced city, must really do something about this.

In the past, we hoped to achieve the objective through publicity or education which are more moderate in nature. But now, it seems that they have not been very effective, for they have failed to bring about any changes over the years. Hong Kong people are very interesting people who are law-abiding. If the law stipulates that something should not be done or if it disallows certain acts, the thinking of the people will naturally change. Now, we may really have to tell society very clearly that this cannot and should not be done and so, this should be clearly written in law.

Finally, I wish to add a couple of points to Mr James TIEN's remarks earlier. In fact, it is not the case that the business sector has no worries. But it is not true that the business sector does not wish to combat racial discrimination. They are worried about whether the legal provisions are written clearly and whether they are open to abuses. We must pay attention to these concerns. This will be our duty after the bill is tabled at the Legislative Council, but during the stage when the bill is being drafted, this will be the job of the Government. Even after the enactment of the legislation, the Government must still do something for education purposes, similar to "giving out orders" to require front-line workers to adopt a certain kind of attitude in their work. In so doing, the Government can take on a leading role in society. In any case, if there are complaints against government departments, that is, if there are already complaints against the first line, then it would cause confidence in the Government to further diminish or make people think that the Government has failed to play its part properly. If such being the case, I think Hong Kong's status as an international city will be tarnished.

Therefore, we very much support Ms Audrey EU's motion today, and we hope that the Government can do better and work faster in the drafting of the bill for follow-up discussions by this Council. Thank you, Madam President.