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The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa K1A 0A2
Canada

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

Re: Supervised Injection Facility (SIF) in Vancouver

I am a Canadian citizen currently living in Hong Kong, teaching sociology in The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I understand that the permit for the SIF in Vancouver is expiring in September. I write to express my support to the project and my hope that the permit will be renewed.

I was born in Hong Kong, but I received my graduate training in Canada. I finished my Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Toronto in 1982. Upon graduation, I taught in Hong Kong for six years, and then returned to Canada with my family as immigrants in 1988. My research interests have been sociology of crime and sociology of health, and this combination gave me an advantage in my application for a Research Scientist position in the then Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario in Toronto, now part of the Canadian Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. During my four years in ARF, I had the opportunity to do research and analyze data pertaining to drug abuse and drug policy. Because of my Chinese ethnic background, I also studied drug issues in ethnocultural communities in Canada.

I came back to Hong Kong to teach in 1992. The expertise that I had acquired in ARF had become a stepping stone for me to study the drug problem in the Hong Kong society. In many ways, the Canadian model, with its greater humanitarian emphasis and high receptivity to harm reduction measures than its neighbour in the south, is a remarkable example for Hong Kong and other Asian societies. While I have continued to collaborate with colleagues in ARF in playing a part in the development of the nascent field of harm reduction, I have made efforts to promote harm reduction elements in the existing treatment system in Hong Kong. Compared with most other Asian societies, Hong Kong

has a drug policy that is more liberal and less punitive. Remarkably, it even has a well developed outpatient Methadone Treatment Programme for thirty years. This, however, does not readily suggest that Hong Kong has long recognized the benefits of the harm reduction approach. On the contrary, it was not until the release six years ago of a positive review of the Methadone Programme conducted by a special working group, of which I was a member, that the harm reduction approach was beginning to be accepted by the government and the community. What I want to stress here is that what is happening in Western societies in the drug field always casts a lot of influence on their Asian counterpart. One could not have imagined how societies adopting a heavily punitive approach to drugs, such as Vietnam and Thailand, had changed their negative attitude towards needle exchange projects and other harm reduction measures, and adopted many of such measures in saving lives at both the individual and community levels.

SIF is one of Canada's latest harm reduction projects and the world is watching. In the past three years, there has been a tremendous amount of professional and academic assessments of the project with respect to its impact on the public health, crime, and other aspects of the community. There is no evidence that the operation of the facility had brought about devastating effects on the community. On the contrary, as many well informed people have pointed out, such a facility is a lifeline for many injection drug abusers.

I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to play a very small part in the process of preparation for the establishment of this great project. Six years ago, I was invited by Portland Hotel Society to come to Vancouver to give talks and joined radio shows in the Chinese community in order to reduce antagonism against the proposed project, generated on the basis of misinformation and prejudice. I was pleased that SIF finally came into being and had gained international recognition over the years.

The receptivity to the harm reduction of Asian societies is slow, compared with Canada. However, successful harm reduction projects always become important demonstrations that it is worth integrating the harm reduction approach into the drug policies of Asian societies. The continuation of the SIF project is important to not only residents of Vancouver or Canada, but also people in Asia and many other parts of the world.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,

Yuet W. Cheung, Ph.D.
Professor