

*Press October 21, 1995*

**Headline :** *Visit of Hong Kong Housing Authority to North America*

**Content :** The following is issued on behalf of the Housing Authority :

A Housing Authority delegation, led by the Chairman, the Hon. Rosanna Wong, returned to Hong Kong today (October 21) following a 7-day (October 12-18) visit to the United States and Canada, covering four cities : Washington D.C., Boston, Ottawa and Toronto.

In Washington D.C., the delegation met with the Secretary for Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Mr Henry Cisneros, who briefed the group on changing conditions, perceptions and policies of public housing in the United States. There were extensive discussions with senior HUD officials on the administration of public housing and the rent certificate/voucher system.

The group also attended a hearing of the House Sub- Committee on Housing and Community Opportunity regarding the Housing Act of 1995, and visited two housing projects run by non-profit organisations.

In Boston, the delegation met with regional HUD officials, state and local officials, and leaders of non- profit housing agencies regarding implementation of housing policies on the ground. This was followed by visits to a number of local housing projects involving public-private partnership.

In Ottawa, the delegation was briefed by officials at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) on the housing market in Canada, the role of CMHC in promoting home ownership, and the work of the Canada Centre for Public-Private Partnership in Housing which capitalizes on private profit-making to achieve social housing objectives. The group also visited various forms of cooperative and non- profit housing projects in the city of Ottawa.

In Toronto, the delegation met with the President and senior officials of the City of Toronto Housing Commission and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Members were briefed on the profile of social housing in Ontario and the future direction.

The delegation has found the visit to be informative and enlightening.

"Notwithstanding the differences in our approach to the provision of subsidized housing, the nature of the problems in front of us is remarkably similar," Ms Wong said.

The delegation noted that in both the US and Canada, promotion of home ownership is a prominent theme. Whereas Hong Kong predominantly relies on the public sector for the provision of subsidized housing, the private sector and non- profit organizations play a more significant role in the US and Canada.

"There is scope for us to harness the energy and resources in the private sector to

work in partnership with the Housing Authority in the provision of public housing," Ms Wong said.

In the face of severe resource constraints on housing authorities in US and Canada, the trend is to increase cost- efficiency of administration and to target limited resources at the most needy. The delegation noted with interest the income declaration and verification procedures and, in particular, HUD's computer system for income data matching with the Inland Revenue Service.

The delegation also received detailed briefings on the rent voucher system in the US and the shelter allowance scheme in Canada. There are pros and cons of such rent supplement schemes.

"I have reservation about the applicability of such rent supplement schemes in Hong Kong where rents in the private sector are high and housing supply is tight," Ms Wong said. "However, we shall look at the details more closely before coming to a conclusion."

End/Saturday, October 21, 1995

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