

Address by
H.E. The Governor
Sir Murray MacLehose,
G.B.E., K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O.,
at the opening session
of the Legislative Council
8 th October 1975
(extract on Housing)

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Housing

Housing Authority

The housing Authority is pursuing the long-term programme to improve housing conditions in Hong Kong with considerable thrust. A new generation of estates, incorporating the concept of comprehensively planned communities, is now fast becoming a reality.

Production of new public housing has increased from flats for 47,000 persons for 1973-74, to 65,000 persons for 1974-75 and to an expected 100,000 for the current financial year. Thereafter the provision of new housing will continue at the level of 100,000 more each year for two years and only in '78-79 is a further steady increase planned to recommence with about 127,000 in that year, 148,000 in the next year and 190,000 in '80-81.

While the comparatively low figures of the last two years reflect merely the long lead-times to which building projects are subject, the pause at the plateau of 100,000 for the next two years reflects the unavoidable restraints imposed by budgeting in time of recession for the many competing demands on resources available.

When we consider the urgency of the human problems involved, obviously a more rapid build up to 150,000 or more would have been highly desirable. It is only at such levels that we can begin to make the decisive impact which we set out to achieve.

Licensed Areas

It is symptomatic of the degree of the housing shortage that the numbers of squatters have risen noticeably in the last few years, probably inflated both by new arrivals from China and by the high rents charged in private housing. For those of them who claim to have no other way of meeting their housing needs the Housing Authority provides a simple form of housing in licensed areas, and as honourable Members are aware the new style of licensed area is vastly improved. Admittedly these temporary housing areas are expensive but they can be constructed quickly and they do bring relief to many families. It is a sobering thought that it may be necessary to accept a further 25,000 persons a year into licensed areas for the next four or five years and only then, and assuming that resources are forthcoming, will the pro-

duction of permanent public housing reach a point at which the licensed areas can start to be run down.

Honourable Members, lack of decent housing is probably the greatest single deficiency in Hong Kong, the greatest single source of unhappiness and stress, probably a cause of crime, certainly an affront to our city. We set out to solve the problem in the shortest time our resources permitted – accepting of course that resources would change for the better or worse with our economy. Let me try and put in perspective how we are progressing.

We may justifiably point with pride to the steadily increasing numbers provided with permanent homes in greatly improved environments. I do not think the Housing Authority could possibly have done more in the last 2 ½ years or for the period up to 1977-78. Nor do I think that the housing achievements of Hong Kong can be matched anywhere in the world, and I should like to express my admiration for the vigour, dedication and professionalism of the Housing Authority.

But we must also face the fact that unless the Authority can acquire the necessary resources from rents and loans to achieve a rapid increase in finished homes from 1978 onwards, the results will be much less than the situation demands or the community expects. We have made a good start in rather difficult circumstances, but we must now follow through.