

LCQ11: Management of Chinese temples

Following is a question by the Hon Tanya Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (December 8):

Question:

At present, temples under the Chinese Temples Committee (the Committee) are subject to the regulation of the Chinese Temples Ordinance (Cap. 153) (the Ordinance), which stipulates that after deducting the expenses on observance of the customary ceremonies and the maintenance of the temple buildings and temple properties, any surplus from the revenues of Chinese temples may be transferred to the General Chinese Charities Fund (GCC Fund). Nevertheless, it has been learned that quite a number of Chinese temples have recently gained huge revenues by building and selling columbarium niches, but they have not transferred their profits to the GCC Fund as required by the Ordinance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether the Committee requires each Chinese temple to submit on a regular basis its financial statements or records in any format to the Committee so as to monitor the financial situations of each temple; if it has, of the details; if not, whether the Government and the Committee have formulated any policy for monitoring the financial management of each Chinese temple; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) in each of the past five years, of the total revenue as well as total expenditure on customary ceremonies, maintenance and other operating expenses of each Chinese temple, the surplus and the amount of money transferred to the GCC Fund by each Chinese temple;

(c) as it has been learned that quite a number of Chinese temples have built columbarium niches for sale recently, and such activities are apparently unrelated to those activities specified to be practiced in Chinese temples (i.e. the worship of gods or communication with spirits or fortune-telling) and allowed to be paid by the revenues of the temples as stipulated in the Ordinance, whether the Government has followed up and investigated the cases concerned according to the Ordinance so as to

ensure that the temples are operated in accordance with the Ordinance; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) whether the Government will consider reviewing and making suitable amendments to the Ordinance so as to ensure that the Ordinance will meet the needs of Hong Kong society today; if it will, of the work-plan and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply

President,

(a) The Chinese Temples Committee (the Committee) currently administers 25 temples directly. The accounts of these temples are prepared by the Secretariat of the Committee. In accordance with the Chinese Temples Fund Regulations (Cap. 153A), revenue from these 25 directly-administered temples shall be transferred to the Chinese Temples Fund (CT Fund). The overall accounts of the Fund are audited by the Commissioner of Audit every year. The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region respects the self-autonomy of religious organisations. It is not the intention of the Committee to monitor the operations of other Chinese temples directly.

(b) The revenue of the 25 directly-administered temples transferred to the CT Fund for the past five years is enclosed at Table I. The expenditure of the CT Fund on customary ceremonies, maintenance of temples and other operating expenses, the surplus of the CT Fund as well as the amount of money transferred to the General Chinese Charities Fund from the CT Fund for the past five years are enclosed at Table II.

(c) Some temples provide columbaria services. To monitor arrangements on the provision of columbaria services is not the right or obligation conferred to the Committee by the Chinese Temples Ordinance (Cap. 153) (the Ordinance). Any cases involving breaches of land use conditions or violation of other relevant legislations may be referred to the appropriate departments for investigation and follow-up.

(d) In order to formulate policies and a regulatory mechanism on columbaria that meet the needs of society, the Administration has conducted a public consultation

exercise. The Home Affairs Bureau will also review the Ordinance from time to time to ensure that it meets present-day needs of the community.

Ends/Wednesday, December 8, 2010

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