

# Abandon the foolish immigration policy

**L**EGISLATIVE Councillor Martin Barrow has given us a timely reminder of the damage being done to this territory's international reputation by our restrictive immigration policies.

"The attitude to visitors from the former Soviet Union remains a concern," said Mr Barrow, who also is chairman of the Hongkong Tourist Association.

The organisers of an international conference on AIDS were forced recently to move the event from Boston to Amsterdam because of American entry restrictions, which scientists have criticised severely, on people with the HIV virus.

## WE SAY

### The Standard

"The wider the opening of admission to men and women with this virus, the more civilised the nation admitting them," one delegate said.

"The US government, however, has chosen to narrow the rights of these people through a foolish, shortsighted and discriminatory immigration policy, thereby damaging and diminishing its own standing in the world community."

The Hongkong Government

has also damaged and diminished its standing in the world community through an equally foolish, shortsighted and discriminatory immigration policy.

In Hongkong's case, the victims of this discrimination are not people with the HIV virus. They are citizens of a wide range of countries whose plans to visit the territory in recent years have been snarled in a web of bureaucracy.

This is a time when our immigration policies should be open-minded, not narrow-minded.

We live in a world dominated by increasing pressures on markets. Our major trad-

ing partners are plagued by economic difficulties. There is a world-wide trend towards protectionism. And Mr Barrow has pointed out that our stringent visa requirements are costing the territory millions of dollars a year.

It is both foolish and shortsighted to rebuff visitors from any country which might some day become an important trading partner.

The former Soviet Union, for example, might not have much money now. But it is potentially an enormous market.

No one is suggesting that we should do away with all immigration controls and procedures. But policies which

were originally introduced as temporary solutions to temporary problems are now clearly out of date.

We must wake up to the reality that the Cold War is over. Senior government officials also must heed Mr Barrow's warning that Hongkong is being abandoned by wealthy Arab businessmen, mainly from the oil-rich Gulf states, because of our stringent visa policies.

Mr Barrow has given the authorities a wake-up call. A deluge of self-righteous official protestations will doubtless rain down upon him.

The changes he proposes reflect a growing public consensus and are long overdue.

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