

Accident victim seeks redress

Amidst the tragedies and suffering of refugees in war-ravaged Vietnam the plight of a single victim of a traffic accident in Hongkong may not seem a major talking point.

Yet the plight of Chan Oi-lan, victim of a traffic accident two years ago, evokes a widespread sense of dismay and sympathy: dismay because after two years her poor family have exhausted their life savings seeking legal redress and getting treatment for the girl; sympathy because a young life has been irreparably ruined without redress from the perpetrator of the accident.

Mrs Elsie Elliott, so often the champion of the down-trodden members of society, has raised the predicament of the girl in a letter to the S.C.M. Post and the answers so far given provide little hope of any immediate remedy.

What is not certain is why the girl was not able to claim on the driver's third-party insurance, regardless of whether he was convicted of careless driving or not.

It is a little difficult to understand, moreover, when the accident occurred on a crossing on which a pedestrian is supposed to have precedence, why the prosecution against the driver failed. Yet another puzzle is why the family did not qualify for legal aid.

It may be difficult tracking down positive answers to all these questions after such a long period of time but there are important principles at stake and in view of the family's poverty a special effort should be made to provide a satisfactory answer.

UMELCO should make it its business to support Mrs Elliott's inquiries. It would also be worth examining whether Chan Oi-lan is entitled to a disability allowance so that the family could be assisted at a time when the main breadwinner is able to obtain only temporary or casual employment.

It is ironic, moreover, that while Hongkong has a scheme to provide ex-gratia compensation to people who become victims of crimes of violence or are accidentally injured by weapons used by policemen in the execution of their duty, there is apparently no contingency to cover people, like this girl, who are injured as a result of an accident and from which they are unable to obtain redress.

In this instance a single case has come to light but there are possibly other people in a similar predicament and who through ignorance or a sense of hopelessness have not sought help.

It is bad enough that this case should have come to light two years later but it would appear that for all our many outlets for people in need - CDOs, ward offices, UMELCO, Neighbourhood Advice Centres, welfare agencies, Legal Aid, Justice - poor and needy people are still being left helpless to fight their own battles.

This is a far more disturbing aspect of the case which deserves close attention.