

Action against Housing Dept?

A social action group is taking legal action against the Housing Department because some of its staff members allegedly intimidated residents of a housing estate in the New Territories.

According to a spokesman for the group, the Ecumenical Community Development Project, the staff members, tried to stop residents of Kwai Shing Housing Estate from taking part in any action aimed at getting a special rental scale for poor tenants.

Some 60 residents of the estate signed petitions delivered to the Acting Governor, Sir Denys Roberts, and the Director of the Housing Department, Mr Donald Liao.

The spokesman claimed that after the residents signed the petitions they were approached by Housing Department personnel, who among other things, allegedly:

- Tried to ruin the reputation of the project's social workers by claiming they were only interested in stirring up trouble in the area.
- Tried to coerce the residents into applying for cheaper accommodation in other estates.
- Tried to pressure tenants into paying the rents they could not afford, and
- Advised tenants that they could recommend moneylenders to them from whom they would borrow money at unspecified interest rates to pay their rents.

The rents, which the project claims the tenants cannot afford to pay, range from \$176 to \$281, for flats housing between five and eight people.

The tenants were rehoused in Kwai Shing from squatter and licensed areas in Kowloon Bay, Ma Tsai Hang Village and Tai Wor Hau.

According to the project's social workers, the residents' efforts to meet the higher rent payments resulted in family disputes, financial hardship, child labour and malnutrition.

The residents, with the assistance of the project's staff, are trying to get the Government set a special rental rate for them until their financial situation improves.