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S.C.M.P.

1 March 1985

1997 housing boost urged

The modest increase in the Government's capital expenditure on public housing construction in 1985-86 drew mild responses from a housing pressure group and an academic.

The director of the People's Council on Public Housing Policy, Mr Fung Kin-kee, called on the Government to solve the housing problem before 1997 by speeding production as housing, if managed improperly, would be a sensitive issue affecting social stability.

A lecturer in urban geography at the University of Hongkong, Miss Leung Waitung, described as a "slight increase" the \$3.9 billion to be spent in 1985-86 compared with the revised estimate of \$3.5 billion in the previous year.

The Financial Secretary also announced that for the next four years from 1985-86, the average completion rate of public housing, both rental and for sale, would be about 44,000 per annum.

This includes the production of rental flats by the Housing Authority and flats for sale under the Home Ownership Scheme and Private Sector Participation Scheme as well as that of the Housing Society.

It is estimated that more than 712,000 people will be provided with subsidised housing in the four years.

The forecast of Housing Authority production in those four years exceeds production in the previous four years by 2.8 per cent.

Mr Fung told the SCM Post the increase in public housing production since 1982 had been a "great progress" compared with the 1970s.

However, he said, if the

present production level continued, the housing problem could only be eased in 1995.

Mr Fung's council has been suggesting to the Housing Authority that they build 52,000 public housing units per annum to solve the housing problem by 1992.

"The problem should be solved as early as possible," he said.

Mr Fung said social stability in the run up to 1997 would be endangered if people stirred up the sensitive housing issue.

Miss Leung said she was happy there was no "decrease" in expenditure on public housing production.

However, the \$400 million increase was not significant, compared with other areas, she said, and it was "not a surprise" to her.

"The slight increase should be satisfactory in the wake of the start of the economic recovery," she said.

The production rate, however, needed to be reviewed constantly.

She said the present level of public housing production could only slightly ease the demand by 150,000 families.

Producing 50,000 housing units per annum could greatly ease the heavy demand, but finance would be a major consideration.

"Therefore, we need to review who are to qualify for subsidised housing as those who can afford higher rent should pay it," she said.

Miss Leung is also a member of the Housing Authority's committee looking at ways to reduce subsidies to better off housing tenants.

To look further ahead, Miss Leung said, the Government should come up with more sources to increase production.