

S. C. W. P.

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500 pledge unity at 'faulty towers' rally

By JULINA CHAN

About 500 angry tenants and shop-owners from 26 defective public housing blocks reaffirmed their demand for compensation at a rally yesterday which ended with "a pledge for unity."

The rally turned into a forum for the organisers, tenant representatives and district board members to voice their demands and concerns over what was branded the biggest housing scandal in Hongkong.

A total of 26 blocks of public housing scattered over the territory were declared substandard by the Housing Authority last month. Approximately 15,000 households and 500 shop-owners are affected and have to relocate over a number of years.

Organised by the Federation of Hongkong, Kowloon and New Territories Public Housing Estates Resident and Shop-owner Organisation, the rally at the Morse Park theatre,

which lasted less than two hours, allowed participants to "air their grievances and fight for their rights."

Officials had hoped that up to 1,000 people would attend the rally.

Speakers from the organising body reiterated their well-publicised demands for "reasonable" compensation and resettlement while other speakers focused on the much-discussed question of responsibility.

Several speeches were reports of the meetings between the organising body and the Housing Department, district boards and other pressure groups on the issue, making the two-hour gathering somewhat of an anticlimax.

The organisers also read out six proposals and 10 demands which they had presented to the Housing Department last month.

Their demands included requests to be resettled in nearby public houses, as well as extra

allowances to furnish their new flats.

The organisers also requested that the Housing Department freeze the rents of affected tenants and shop-owners at a level which would alleviate the financial burden of moving.

Six district board members who represent the constituencies where faulty public houses were found, together with some 50 tenant and shop-owner representatives from all the defective blocks, were present at the rally.

The chairman of the mass rally, Mr Wong Kam-chi, also an elected member of Wong Tai Sin District Board, called on the Housing Department to accept all the demands of the rally in his concluding remarks.

He stressed the Government had a "moral obligation" toward affected tenants and shop-owners and repeated their demand for "reasonable" compensation.

In his final statement at the

close of the rally, Mr Wong urged residents, shop-owners, pressure groups and other concerned parties to "join hands in the fight for the basic right for a stable living."

He pledged that the organisations concerned would unite and continue a dialogue with the Housing Department until their demands were met.

The chairman of the federation, Mr Lam Yuk-tong, also an elected member of the Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi District Board, said after the rally they had to wait for the outcome of a meeting with the Housing Department later this month before they could decide on their next move.

One of the participants, 58-year-old Mr Shit Pan-wo, attended the rally in a wheelchair.

He said he has been living with a room-mate in Sau Mau Ping estate block 26 for seven years. Mr Shit said he had to move out after one year but had "no idea" where he would be resettled.