

4P.C. OF HEALTH BILL FOR BOAT PEOPLE

# Refugees knock \$24m out of medical budget

HONGKONG taxpayers have been deprived of \$24 million worth of medical facilities because the Government has spent the money on the 67,000 Vietnamese refugees, Federation of Hongkong Industries member, Susan Yuen, claimed yesterday.

Mrs Yuen made the claim after Acting Secretary for Security Morris Morgan made a nine-page speech at the federation's luncheon yesterday on the problem of Vietnamese refugees and illegal immigrants from China.

Mr Morgan shied away from Mrs Yuen's question on whether the money spent on medical care for refugees would be reimbursed.

She said the illegal immigrant problem is totally different from the refugee situation, because illegals can eventually

find homes, whereas the Vietnamese are a total burden.

"The Vietnamese refugee is a privileged group in the community because about \$6 a day is being spent for his upkeep, while the cost of feeding a third class patient in hospitals is only \$4," Mrs Yuen said.

To this, Mr Morgan said the daily allowance for refugees had been cut several times from \$8 a day to \$6 and now it is down to \$3.

Justifying the medical expenses for refugees, Mr Morgan said: "It is in our interests as taxpayers that the Medical and Health Department is taking preventive measures in its care for refugees.

Mrs Yuen said four per cent of the Medical and Health budget for this year is being spent on caring for the refugees.

"If this money is not reimbursed, Hongkong citizens would be deprived of four per cent of medical services," she added.

The Government's total budget for medical services in the financial year is about \$600 million.

Mr Morgan also said the trend of arrivals and departures was in balance since the Geneva conference on refugees, but there had been no net reduction in the total of 67,000 refugees.

The effects of the refugee problem have not been disruptive and no major social development programme has been significantly impeded.

Mr Morgan admitted that on average, the 13,000 refugees currently under employment, are being paid slightly below normal rates.

"But then, they are not subject to the same expenses such as rents which fall on residents, and they are only temporary and largely untrained employees with their sights firmly fixed on overseas resettlement," he said.

Mr Morgan said the situation of illegal immigrants sneaking in from China will continue to be a major problem for the Government.

He said the security forces arrested more than 46,500 illegals in the first six months of the year, and an estimated 67,000 have evaded capture during this period.

He said the Government's policy in allowing illegals who "reach home base" to remain in Hongkong was prompted by the possibility that harsh action could lead to the formation of underground groups.

"To attempt to arrest illegals after they have reached the family home, could lead to such people forming an underground community, a sub-strata of our society living in fear outside the law, with all of the consequential social and law and order problems which would entail," Mr Morgan said.

Another problem for the Government is illegal immigrants from Macao, who are sneaking in through organised criminal syndicates.

"In July, 623 illegals from Macao were arrested by security forces, and the majority of them had recently arrived in the Portuguese territory from China," he said.

"Up to the 19th of this month, 485 illegals from Macao were arrested, including 478 recent arrivals from China," he added.

Mr Morgan said the Government had received assurances from the Macao authorities that it will cooperate in dealing with the smuggling of illegal immigrants from Macao.