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Law experts prepare groundwork

Advisory group is step closer

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A six-member group has been set up under the Basic Law Drafting Committee to prepare a constitution for the consultative committee.

This is the first concrete step towards forming the advisory body which has caused so much concern for many community groups in Hongkong.

The new sub-committee, headed by Mr Justice Simon Li, includes the other three legal experts in the drafting committee and Mr Szeto Wah, a member from the education and labour fields, and Mr Mao Junnian, deputy secretary-general of the local branch of the New China News Agency.

The first meeting of Hongkong members of the drafting committee after their return from Beijing early this month also decided to set up a preparatory office for the consultative committee.

The meeting was chaired by Mr T.K. Ann who is the senior vice-chairman of the drafting committee.

It was also attended by Mr Xu Jiatur,

director of the NCNA and a vice-chairman of the committee.

A statement after the three-hour meeting in the China Resources Building said the preparatory office would be assisted by NCNA officials.

The three legal experts in the sub-committee, established to draw up a constitution for the consultative committee, are Mr Martin Lee, QC, Miss Maria Tam and Miss Liu Yiu-chu.

Mr Szeto is included because of his strong links with community groups, and Mr Mao, who is also deputy secretary-general of the drafting committee, is expected to act as a secretary.

The sub-committee is to hold its first meeting next Tuesday.

Besides the decisions on the formation of the sub-committee and preparatory office for the consultative committee, there were no resolutions on other agenda items.

They included the funding of the consultative committee and the selection of members.

According to some members of the drafting committee, while there are still differing views on some issues, opinions are heading towards consensus.

Mr Szeto said some of the conflicts were "settled" and others "relieved." He said members were willing to listen and accept the views of others.

"Some issues will have to be settled in the next meeting," he said.

Miss Liu told reporters the drafting committee felt that before members of the consultative committee could be invited or brought in, the first thing to be accomplished was the constitution.

Then people would know what they are getting themselves into — the exact nature and scope of their work and their powers, she said.

She said there were pros and cons to drafting committee members sitting with the consultative group as well.

The majority view seems to be more in favour of no overlap of work.

There was a lot of discussion about whether members of the consultative committee should be invited or recommended.

According to one of the members, Mr Lau Wong-fat, some members of the consultative committee should be invited by drafting committee members.

The others should come from district boards, Umelco, Urban Council, the Regional Council, Heung Yee Kuk, rural committees, kai fong associations and functional constituencies.

Mr Lau, who is the chairman of Heung Yee Kuk, said their serving terms should be

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Advisory group's framework studied

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specified and a provision should be included to allow voluntary resignations.

And even with representative members brought into the consultative committee, there will inevitably be some "valuable opinions" in the community missed out.

So it won't lose these views, the drafting committee could use the mass media to solicit opinions in writing from any organisations or

individuals, even after the consultative committee is set up.

The statement on yesterday's meeting also said members had expressed their opinions from different angles and presented in-depth analysis on the agenda items. After the "democratic consultative process," members had reached a consensus on several points.

In accordance with the speech of Mr Ji Pengfei, director of the Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office under the State Council, to the drafting committee meeting in Beijing, members exchanged views on setting up a Basic Law consultative group in Hongkong.

They agreed to set up a preparatory office of the consultative committee with the help of the NCNA local branch.

Members also discussed the issue of funding the consultative committee.

It was decided that discussion on the matter would be continued at the next meeting.

Concerning the constitution of the consultative committee, a six member sub-committee was formed which will draw up a draft constitution for discussion at the next meeting.

Discussion on the creation and composition of the consultative committee was postponed until the next meeting, scheduled for August 20.

Street poll on Basic Law to be published

An organisation formed by a group of people concerned with the political future of Hongkong recently distributed 10,000 questionnaires on the drafting of the Basic Law.

The secretary-general of the "I Love Free Hongkong Campaign" committee, Mr Chan Koon-wah, said they began distributing the questionnaires in the streets earlier this month and received about 2,000 replies.

He said the group will publish the results of the poll in major newspapers before Saturday.

Meanwhile, the leftwing Hongkong Federation of Trade Unions has begun collating the views of its 160,000-strong members on the Basic Law.

About 10,000 questionnaires were sent to the 72-member unions to gauge their aspirations and wishes on the constitution of Hongkong after 1997.

The largest pro-Taiwan trades union however has given a cool reception to the drafting exercise.

A veteran leader of the rightwing Trades Union Council, Mr Pang Chun-hoi said they doubted the sincerity of Beijing leaders in giving local people a say in the drafting.

He said they would indirectly put forward their views to the Beijing-appointed drafters and consultants through "middlemen" whom they trusted.

The chairman of the Cotton Industry Workers General Union, Mr Pang said: "We absolutely will not take a direct role in the deliberations of the Basic Law."

Mr Pang said they would not actively seek members' views on the Basic Law.

"There will not be formal discussions or surveys among the members."

He said he would turn down any invitation to sit on the Basic Law consultative committee.