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## \$900,000 support for dissidents

By DAPHNE CHENG

THE local support group for the pro-democracy movement in China has spent almost \$900,000 in assisting fugitive mainland dissidents and vows to continue to do so.

The Hongkong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China revealed yesterday that from last May to mid-August it had spent \$899,046.27 on the dissidents.

The sum included medical fees, accommodation costs and transport expenses for the mainlanders who have either fled overseas via Hongkong or are still in the territory awaiting resettlement since the June 4 massacre.

During the period, the 230-group alliance has collected almost \$24 million. More than \$4.5 million has been spent on various activities, including a number of demonstrations and mass rallies, leaving a balance of nearly \$19 million.

Lawyer Albert Ho Chunyan, who oversees the

Alliance's accounts, yesterday explained that the financial assistance for the dissidents was offered on humanitarian grounds.

"We offered help to the dissidents who contacted us while awaiting resettlement elsewhere. The bulk of the sum was used for their living expenses in Hongkong. We had to take care of their personal safety and accommodation here before they left.

"A small amount was spent on helping them during the first few months after they resettled in overseas countries," said Mr Ho, a general committee member of the Alliance.

However, he did not give details on how many and whom they had assisted though he vowed to continue to pledge support to future dissidents.

He said such matters were handled by one of the Alliance's five sub-groups, the support group. A further reserve of \$100,000 has been put aside for the group's use.

The Alliance now manages three separate accounts

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under the names of the Joint Committee for the Promotion of Democratic Government (JCPDG), the Marathon Concert held in May and the Professional Teachers' Union (PTU).

Of the \$900,000, \$564,000 was spent under the JCPDG's account. The remaining \$335,000 was drawn from proceeds of the concert.

"We have no concrete plan right now on how to spend the rest of the money," said Mr Ho, adding that they would continue to sponsor overseas organisations.

In July, \$1.2 million was channelled to the China Democratic Front, launched by fugitive dissidents including Wu'erkaixi and Yan Jiaqi. A further \$100,000

was also allocated for the group two weeks ago.

"We may give more money to the front in future, but we haven't decided whether to permanently assist any groups," Mr Ho said.

He said a special committee has been set up to vet applications for funds from overseas groups.

"We will consider applications from groups who are using peaceful and non-violent means to support the democracy movement in China," he said.

Besides the front, about \$400,000 was also given to a student federation in the US.

Mr Ho also disclosed that the Alliance had decided recently that requests not exceeding \$100,000 would not have to go to the general

meeting for approval.

But he dismissed suggestions that sponsoring overseas organisations had gone against their objective.

"We have sought legal advice and there is no legal dispute over it. Right from the beginning we have spelt out our aim which is to assist any groups supporting China's democracy movement," he said.

He said so far only a few donors wanted to claim back their money. The Alliance would meet them to clarify the matter later.

Locally, a fund has been set up to finance activities and groups in Hongkong, Mr Ho said.

The Alliance also agreed to fund transport fees for its members to participate in any overseas democracy events or delegations.