

CBA General Conference Delhi 15 – 18 February 2006

Brief Report on Hong Kong's Broadcasting Review

Four weeks ago, the Hong Kong Government announced the setting up of an independent committee to review public service broadcasting in Hong Kong.

The announcement was an anxiously anticipated event. In the weeks preceding this, there were already leaks and speculations printed in local newspapers. Obviously this has been a sensitive issue, and many commentators would relate a review with the preservation of press freedom in Hong Kong.

The review committee is tasked to recommend an appropriate arrangement for the provision of public service broadcasting in Hong Kong. It is expected to complete the review in nine months.

Our concerns :

- (a) The review committee has seven members, but none of them could claim to have any useful experience in public broadcasting. RTHK has repeatedly made the point that for the review committee to be able to discuss public service broadcasting issue in a fair and all-round manner, it should have included experts with working experience or research background in public broadcasting.
- (b) In the government announcement, a question is posed about the justifications for public service broadcasting. Public service broadcasting is described as a form of market intervention through the allocation of public resources. If this is indicative of the thinking behind the purpose of the review, then the danger must be that the public broadcaster will in future be marginalised and confined to operate in areas of programming not provided by the commercial stations.
- (c) Again in the government document, there is a paragraph saying "public service broadcasting seeks to bring about social cohesion, develop national identity and cultural preservation." In Hong Kong, we are keenly aware of the trappings in arguments for political correctness. Any suggestion to focus on social cohesion and national identity is seen by supporters of public broadcasting as hurting editorial independence and press freedom.

Here is our plea to fellow broadcasters : The review committee has vowed to undertake study tours to examine the experiences of overseas public broadcasters. Hong Kong's Legislature has also set up its study panel to do the same. In the coming months, they may try to get information from some of our colleagues in the meeting. We certainly hope that when contacted, you could give your strongest possible support by emphasizing

the importance of public broadcasting in your country.

Again for some colleagues in this meeting, a broadcasting review may not sound such an innovative idea. You probably have dealt with one or more reviews before. I am sure there are lessons to be learned, and I and my two colleagues from RTHK would welcome your valuable advice.

CHU Pui Hing
Director of Broadcasting
Radio Television Hong Kong
(chuph@rthk.org.hk)

15 February 2006