



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

1 August 1978

From The Minister of State

The Rt Hon The Lord Goronwy- Roberts

*Dear Mrs Elliott,*

Thank you for your letter of 24 June proposing certain changes in Hong Kong's political institutions. I am sorry not to have replied earlier but I wanted to give careful thought to your proposals.

Let me say at once that the British Government share your concern that Hong Kong should be administered in the interests of all those who live there. We welcome constructive expressions of opinion from informed people in Hong Kong. I was, therefore, very glad to receive your letter and can assure you that full weight will be given to your views in the consideration, in consultation with the Hong Kong Government, of the way in which the territory should be governed.

I should naturally like to see appropriate moves at the right time towards a more representative system in Hong Kong. The problem for us is to decide what is appropriate and when. We shall continue to ponder these problems taking due account of the points you make. In the special circumstances of Hong Kong we must, however, exercise patience and caution when considering changes that could affect the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. The maintenance of confidence in Hong Kong must, I am sure you will agree, be one of our major concerns.

This said, I must tell you that I do not share your view that the Hong Kong Government ride rough-shod over their citizens. We and the Hong Kong Government see our role as a partnership with the people of Hong Kong in advancing their material and social well-being. Given the absence of broadly representative democratic institutions, it is, undeniably, difficult for the Government to be sure of what the people of Hong Kong really want. But the Hong Kong Government are sincere in their efforts to find out popular opinion on all aspects of public life, and they try to be responsive to any expression of general will that may emerge. The main problem, however, as one would expect in a country with a free press and freedom of expression, is that there is rarely unanimity on any issue. The Government therefore have to balance conflicting views on

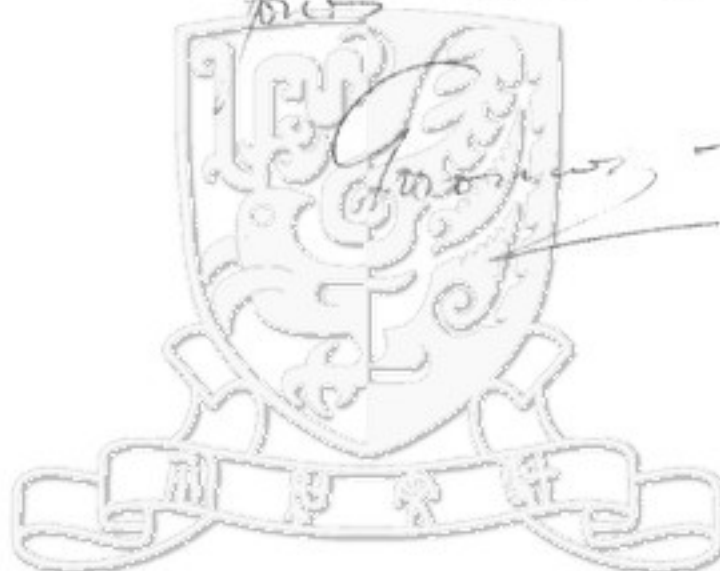
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almost every important question. It is a mistake to think that, because the Government does not appear to act on the views expressed by a particular group of people, they are therefore either unaware of those views or else do not care about them.

I agree with you that the arrival on the political scene of a new generation of young people who were born in Hong Kong, and who have been brought up to regard it as their home, introduces a major new factor. This is certainly something that we shall need to take into account in considering how Hong Kong should be administered in the future.

Yours sincerely,



- Roberts.

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