

Hong Kong: Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA) statements

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1st February, 2020 Second Extraordinary General Meeting of the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA)

Healthcare Workers: Together We Stand, Strike to Protect Hong Kong

<https://www.facebook.com/HA.EmployAlliance/posts/137652757705865>

The second Extraordinary General Meeting of the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA) was held today.

There were a total of 3 164 votes cast by the members of the HAEA, in which 3 123 voted “Yes” to the motion of strike action.

As of now, there are more than 9 000 HAEA members who have signed the pledge to strike. They have promised to stand with us in participating in the five-day strike plan. The Executive Committee of the HAEA would like to express our sincerest thanks to the tremendous support of our members. The HAEA believes the decision to strike is not an easy one. In fact, we believe such actions are our last resort. In the past few days, led by our Chief Executive Carrie Lam, the Emergency Response Level Steering Committee cum Command Centre has held multiple press conferences to make announcements on various disease prevention and control measures.

Yet, all of these measures (including the reduction on entry to Hong Kong via China, school suspension, medical surveillance, allocation of infection control supplies etc.) are doomed to fail when the government is adamant in refusing to address the crux of the problem.

As country after country begins to announce the banning of foreigners’ entry from China, the Hong Kong government chooses to keep its doors wide open. The already limited resources and manpower in Hong Kong that are necessary for healthcare will soon be completely depleted, as an endless stream of non-Hong Kong residents continues to come into the city, seeking for medical care. The already dire situation in Hong Kong could only turn even direr, for the incompetence of our government continues to bring us to the point of no return. Thus, the HAEA refuses to believe that any of the so-called disease prevention and control measures implemented could be truly effective, when there is not a complete restriction of suspected cases entering Hong Kong via mainland China.

The HAEA now urges the Hospital Authority to invite Carrie Lam, the Chairperson of the Emergency Response Level Steering Committee cum Command Centre, to participate in our negotiation meeting with the Hospital Authority tomorrow (2nd February). The HAEA appeals to those in power to listen to the voices of the frontline healthcare workers directly, and to answer our demands in a

constructive manner. All actions to mislead or evade the demands should be ceased completely.

The following Five Demands are endorsed in today's Extraordinary General Meeting -
Regarding the below two points, the HAEA urges the Hospital Authority to issue a public statement to pressure the government into actions -

1. To forbid all travelers from entering Hong Kong via China
2. To implement constructive measures to ensure a sufficient supply of masks

Regarding the below three points, the HAEA urges the Hospital Authority to ensure a safe working environment for its staff -

3. To provide sufficient isolation wards, to stop all non-emergency services
4. To provide sufficient support and facilitation for healthcare staff caring for patients under isolation
5. To publicly commit to not taking any disciplinary actions in retaliation

The HAEA will prepare the negotiation details regarding the above Five Demands. If a constructive response cannot be obtained on 2nd February, the HAEA will initiate a five-day strike action.

Below is the detailed plan -
Strike Plan

The strike plan will commence on 3rd February for five days in two stages.
The first stage is aiming at suspending the non-emergency services of the Hospital Authority. Existing working arrangement under adverse weather will be adopted on 3rd February. HAEA members who do not need to work under Typhoon Signal No. 8, including staff working in out-patient clinics, administrative staff and so on, will join the strike. For other HAEA members, they will follow the current practice under individual departmental guidelines for adverse weather. The overall arrangement is similar to the situation as if Typhoon Signal No. 8 is hoisted on 3rd February. The duration of the first stage is 1 day, if the Hospital Authority does not propose any concrete solutions to the Five Demands as mentioned by 3rd February at 2100, the strike will be escalated to the second stage.

All members of the HAEA regardless of ranks or specialties will participate in the second stage of strike, aiming that only limited emergency services can be provided under the Hospital Authority. The duration of this stage is 4 days, if the Hospital Authority still does not propose any concrete solutions to the Five Demands by 7th February at 2359, the HAEA will consider to further escalate the degree of industrial action.

The Hospital Authority Employees Alliance
1st February, 2020

Tuesday 4th February: Summary of Strike - Day 2

Today is the second stage of the strike initiated by the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA). This morning, over 4 000 HAEA members first queued up to hand in petition letters to the Hospital Authority (HA); in the afternoon, they returned to one of the seven cluster hospitals to sign in. According to our data, **over 7 000 members** have participated in the second stage of the strike action today, which is **close to 10% of all staff members** within the HA.

The members on strike included various departments and ranks.

- The majority is **nursing staff** - over 4 500 of them have participated in today's strike, which accounted for 17% of the total nursing staff in the HA.

- Around 360 **doctors** have also struck today, representing 5% of the total number of doctors in the HA.
- Over 1 200 **allied health professionals** have taken part in today's strike, which accounted for 15% of the total allied health staff in the HA.
- Other staff that struck today included supporting and administrative staff etc.

The extensive composition of staff taking part in the strike is a clear indication that regardless of rank or department, many HA staff members have chosen to stand up against the incompetence of our government and the HA.

Today's strike involved close to 10% of all staff within the HA, conveying a strong objection to the HA and the government. Yesterday, the Chairperson of the Emergency Response Level Steering Committee cum Command Centre, Carrie Lam, while refusing again to meet with the HAEA publicly, had continued to smear our strike action as an "extreme act".

Although the management of the HA was pressured into a public meeting with the HAEA yesterday, they failed to respond to any of our demands. Instead, they continued to shift the focus during our meeting, and refused to stand with their staff in pressuring the government together. Once again, Hong Kong has lost precious time and opportunity in implementing effective infection control measures, and the situation our healthcare workers are in turns more and more dangerous.

The HAEA had no choice but to announce the escalation of strike action today.

The HAEA would like to take this opportunity to thank the HAEA members who have struck with us. Yet, while our colleagues have voiced out courageously and loudly, Carrie Lam still remains mute and blind to our demands, and has yet to meet with the frontline healthcare workers publicly.

To further deepen the ridicule, as the leader of the Emergency Response Level Steering Committee cum Command Centre, not only did she refuse to fully close our border, she also demanded her employees to stop wearing masks. As locally-infected cases continue to appear in our community, with the first death also occurring today, the HAEA must issue the strongest warning that a large-scale community outbreak could happen anytime now. All lives of the citizens of Hong Kong are under threat.

The HKSAR government must put the lives of Hong Kongers at the highest priority, and must cease to put politics above all decisions. The closing of the border must be immediately implemented and there is absolutely no room for negotiation. The government must close our border now to safeguard the precious lives of the Hong Kongers.

Today, the healthcare workers have demonstrated to all of Hong Kong that it is possible for Hong Kongers to strike. Indeed, our strike has begun to inspire others, as various unions of different labour sectors have been planning to hold General Meetings this weekend, with the intention to initiate strikes of their own as a continuation of our fight. If the government is determined to be the enemies of its people and continues to refuse to close our border, the fight to protect Hong Kong would only escalate as more Hong Kongers would join in.

The HAEA is about to enter the third day of our strike. Even when we face harsh roads ahead, we are determined to stand with our members, to stand with everyone in Hong Kong.

The HAEA now issues yet another invitation to Carrie Lam for a public meeting, as she has repeatedly stated that she has "high respect" for healthcare workers. To show our sincerity, the HAEA shall be present at the Chief Executive's Office at 10am tomorrow. If Carrie Lam has any intention to truly tackle the infection spreading in Hong Kong, she must have a public meeting with the HAEA tomorrow at 10am.

Hospital Authority Employees Alliance
(4th February, 2020)

Wednesday 5th February: Summary of Strike - Day 3

Today is the third day of strike initiated by the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA). This morning, together with other new unions, Legislative and District Councillors, the representatives of the HAEA went to the Central Government Offices to hand in petition letters.

We have again urged for a public audience with Carrie Lam, the Chairperson of the Emergency Response Level Steering Committee cum Command Centre. Yet, she continued to show her disregard to the voices of the 7 000 healthcare workers on strike, as well as to the demands made by the HAEA and the people of Hong Kong.

The HAEA also set up stations at the Admiralty Centre Footbridge in the morning, and at eight hospitals in the afternoon for our members on strike to sign in. According to our data, **over 7 000 members** have participated in the third day of our strike, which is close to **10% of all staff members** within the Hospital Authority (HA).

Similar to yesterday, the members on strike included various departments and ranks.

- The majority is nursing staff- over 4500 of them have participated in today's strike, which accounted for 17% of the total nursing staff in the HA.
- Around 370 doctors have also struck today, representing 6% of the total number of doctors in the HA.
- Over 1000 allied health professionals have taken part in today's strike, which accounted for 13% of the total allied health staff in the HA.
- Other staff that struck today included supporting and administrative staff etc.

Today, Carrie Lam has announced a number of preventive measures for infection control, which includes making use of the "Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation" to **implement 14 days of mandatory quarantine** for anyone who arrives Hong Kong from China, Hong Kong citizens and non-citizens included. Those under quarantine will not be allowed to leave Hong Kong. These measures will be implemented on 8th February at midnight (Saturday), yet "the details are still being drafted", thus the government did not disclose the specific information on how they plan on quarantining tens of thousands of people arriving Hong Kong from China.

The HAEA has serious doubts on whether the aforementioned measures would be effective for infection control, especially when little details are disclosed, it is impossible to estimate the burden this would bring to our healthcare system.

According to the numbers released by the Immigration Department yesterday (4th February), there was still nearly **10,000 passenger** traffic recorded entering Hong Kong from China. If all of them are subjected to 14 days of quarantine, we cannot imagine whether Hong Kong has the sufficient manpower and resources to handle tens of thousands of people under quarantine.

Even if this number is largely reduced as suggested optimistically by Carrie Lam, say down to only 10%, Hong Kong still need to facilitate the quarantine of more than 10,000 people at a time.

Also, before the deadline of 8th February, there is still little restrictions on entries to Hong Kong from China, meaning that a large influx of people "rushing" to Hong Kong seems unavoidable. The HAEA expresses the highest level of doubt on whether Hong Kong has the ability to care for such a large number of people under mandatory quarantine, when we are already dealing with **severe shortage of resources and the depletion of surgical masks** in our community.

The HAEA must reiterate our definition for the **"full closure of the border"** -

- All Hong Kong permanent residents who enter Hong Kong from China must be subjected to mandatory quarantine for 14 days (same as the announcement made by the government today);
- All other people, regardless of their nationality, should NOT be allowed to enter Hong Kong from China;

The transportation of everyday goods and infection control supplies should be allowed, with effective health monitoring measures for drivers and workers;

This definition does not contain any elements of discrimination, unlike the continued smearing on part of the government and other pro-government parties.

The HAEA is extremely worried about the arrival of 8th February, when Hong Kong would be turned into a large-scale isolation camp. Our already overwhelmed healthcare system will be under even more relentless pressure. As we have already suffered from one death and more locally-transmitted confirmed cases in Hong Kong, we are dangerously close to a massive community outbreak.

However, in the press conference held by the HA just then, Dr Vivien Chuang, Chief Manager (Infection, Emergency and Contingency) stated that there is no need for patients with respiratory symptoms to stay in individual isolation rooms. The HAEA believes this goes against the infection control measures that have been adopted for years.

We do not understand why there is a sudden change in recommendations, when those who were isolated individually yesterday could be isolated with others today. The HAEA suspects that due to the limited number of isolation rooms or wards, the HA has chosen to risk cross infections among patients in order to “solve” the problem of insufficient isolation facilities. The HAEA believes the situation now is tremendously critical, yet the HA has done no practical improvement regarding the support and protection of their frontline staff.

Instead, they focused their energy on verbally asking the workers on strike to “change their minds” and come back to work. As the infected cases continue to enter our city from China, locally-transmitted cases also begin to rise, the healthcare workers within the HA need sufficient support, facilitation and protection to reduce their risk at work, now more than ever. **For the sake of our colleagues and the patients under our care**, the HAEA does not accept the possibility of any sacrifices of our colleagues.

As Hong Kong might soon become a large-scale isolation camp for travellers, while community-transmitted cases continue to appear, the HAEA worries that the HA will face an even worse situation, and the safety of its staff will be further compromised. While the spreading of the disease is at light speed, the HA continues to react at a snail’s pace. This would inevitably result in a severely dangerous working environment.

As a trade union that represents one-fourth (??) of the labour in the HA, the HAEA now urges the HA to negotiate with us immediately regarding the dire issues of limited resources to battle the infection.

The HAEA now reiterates our demands towards the HA:

1. To provide sufficient isolation wards, to stop all non-emergency services (salles d’isolement)
2. To provide sufficient support and facilitation for healthcare staff caring for patients under isolation
3. To publicly commit to not taking any disciplinary actions in retaliation

The failure of the HA in face of a fast approaching outbreak is simply unacceptable. The HAEA urges all members to continue our strike and fight till the end.

Hospital Authority Employees Alliance
(5th February, 2020)

Friday 7th February: Chairperson’s Speech, Conclusion of Strike Action

Dear comrades in arms, we thank you for your hardship in taking part of our strike this week. Today is the most important moment of our strike, as we will need to make the important decision on

whether we should extend our strike.

There are more than 4 000 members who have participated in today's strike.

Also, more than 7 000 members have voted in our poll regarding the decision to extend our strike.

Over 4000 members have expressed their wish to not extend the strike, but continue to fight for our demands with other means.

Thus, it is with a heavy heart that the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA) announces the suspension of our strike as per our poll result.

The Executive Committee would like to convey our understanding and respect towards this result. As the decision is made democratically by our members, we would like to ask for the respect of our colleagues and everyone else for our decision.

Healthcare workers on strike face incomparable pressures than other labour sectors. In the past few days, we have endured the misunderstanding, doubt and even blame of some of the general public. We are thankful for our members who continued to stand with us. We are also grateful to other friends who lend us a helping hand, such as Hong Kongers from all walks of lives, other unions who were on strike with us, District Councillors who helped promoting our cause in their communities, volunteers who helped us set up stations. We would like to express our sincerest thanks for choosing to walk with us side by side.

It is not an easy feat to be on strike till today. We are also aware that many colleagues are worried about the very imminent possibility of community outbreaks. They are unwilling to give up on their patients, unwilling to leave their colleagues on duty to suffer the pressure of resources shortage. We understand that a lot of colleagues are indignant and disgruntled (indignés et mécontents) towards today's outcome.

Please know that the Executive Committee also shares the same feelings. We would like to urge everyone to please remember this feeling, remember that we should not forget our demands. In the future, the Executive Committee will continue to do our duty in pressuring the Hospital Authority, in fighting for all measures that can ensure the safety of our workplace.

At the same time, our union will continue to be the strongest support for our members, aiming to protect each and every one of us against the future retaliation of our employers.

The HAEA will strive to fight for our every demand, and thus we must stay united, we must believe in all of our colleagues, brothers and sisters around us. The HAEA now officially announces the establishment of the **"Strike Fund to Control the Wuhan Coronavirus Epidemic"**, aiming at supporting the brothers and sisters of this fight, and the Hong Kongers who take industrial actions for this purpose.

In the past five days, we have received tremendous support throughout our society. Even the patients who were affected wrote to us to express their understanding and support towards our strike. Any decision made at this juncture is not going to be an easy one. We wish for everyone's understanding and respect towards the decision we have made, and will continue to support healthcare workers' efforts in protecting Hong Kong. Yet, we would also like to express our sincerest apologies towards those who were affected by us.

Without the endurance and hard work from everyone, this fight would never have happened. The so-called "reduction of cross-boundary people flow" or "partial sealing of borders" measures would never exist.

Without this fight, the pressure on our healthcare system would be even greater. Hong Kongers are undoubtedly initiating a new battlefield for our protest - labour unions. In view of this new attempt, we could only wade through the stream by feeling our way. (patauger dans le courant en tâtonnant). There are indeed many more we can do to improve. Yet it is our belief that with your continued support and participation, we will pave the road for even more labour movements.

Through our union, we are able to connect with 20,000 members. After this battle, we will always be

brothers and sisters. In the future, we will begin to establish our foundations in every hospital, and to set up branches of the union at every district. We will aim to represent every cluster and every department, while continuing our fight for the safety of healthcare workers.

Finally, we hope that all of us will win this war against the epidemic.

One day, we will meet again without our masks, breathing in the clean, fresh air of freedom.

Hospital Authority Employees Alliance

7th February, 2020

P.S.

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