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Press Release

Housing problem is not against nature conservation

Grassroots and environmental groups urge the government to make good use of land, improve housing policy and protect the countryside

13 concerned grassroots groups and 13 environmental groups (see attached table) issued a joint statement for the first time. They pointed out that protecting country parks is not the opposite of resolving the needs of grassroots housing. The government deliberately creates confrontation and ignores the long-existing injustice in land use planning and housing issues.

Since the former Chief Executive, CY Leung, commissioned the Housing Society to study two sites at the periphery of country parks for public housing development, social controversy continues. However, the concern of grassroots groups is that land supply is not the only cause of housing problems, and the impact of unfair distribution of land and housing resources is far-reaching. The Government targeting periphery of country parks for development is a diversion of sight. It will take 15 to 18 years to develop the site and it will not shorten the waiting time for public housing in the short term.

Vivien Yau, member of Kwai Chung Subdivided Flat Residents Alliance said: "The government has been ignoring land planning and housing injustices, including the vast majority of Fanling Golf Courses occupied by a small number of people, the proportion of public and private housing supply is much lower than the policy target of 6:4, and the rents are rising after the cancellation of rental control. In fact, in recent years, they have suddenly advocated the development of country parks periphery for the grassroots, which is hypocritical."

Jay Yam, Committee Organizer of Concerning Grassroots Housing Rights' Alliance, pointed out that guarding the countryside is also an important value. The Government should not mislead the public to think that there is only housing demand in the community. She continued, "In addition to conserving the natural ecology, country parks also provide free space and facilities for all citizens, no matter rich and poor."

The environmental protection organization stressed that once the natural ecology is damaged, the consequences are irreversible. Therefore, the Government must be cautious and give priority to use other land to build houses, instead of rashly set a bad precedent and develop country parks which are strictly protected by the law.

Andy Chu, Greenpeace Campaigner, said, "The housing and the countryside are also important elements of the quality of life of the people. The two are not incompatible. The Government estimates that there will be only 49 hectares of land demand for public housing in the next eight years. 723 hectares of brownfields not included any current plans and part of the Fanling Golf Course already can solve the problem."

According to a survey conducted by Shue Yan University commissioned by Greenpeace, half of the respondents thought that the development of country park periphery is unacceptable or they are worried about the proposal, indicating that the scheme did not receive the support of the majority of the public.

The group quoted the UN's important document on sustainable development, Agenda 21, stating that the enjoyment of adequate housing is a basic human right and that the government should plan the land without damaging the environment. The New Urban Agenda adopted by the United Nations at the end of 2016 also reaffirmed that all people should have the right to adequate housing, but to protect important and fragile ecosystems through sustainable land use patterns. Therefore, the grassroots groups and environmental organizations urge the government to actively consider the following recommendations:

Make good use of land resources

- Prioritize the planning and use of brownfields, Fanning golf courses and idle land for public housing
- Construction of public housing in some urban redevelopment areas
- Make good use of government idle land, buildings and school buildings to build transitional houses
- Stop considering the development of country parks and their periphery to protect natural resources
- Regarding reclamation outside the Victoria Harbour, the Government must clearly list the site selection and provide detailed information, including reclamation criteria, ecological value assessment and development blueprint, and explain why there are other priority development sites to meet housing demand. Still have to choose to reclamation

Improve housing policy

- Reset tenancy control, limit rent increase, protect tenancy rights, and balance the rights of owners and tenants
- Introduce a rent allowance to provide rent allowance to applicants on the Waiting List for three years or more. The amount is the difference between the monthly rent of public housing and the monthly rent of the private housing market.
- Apart from establishing a first-hand property vacancy tax, the same measures are applied to second-hand properties to prevent owners and property developers from hoarding