



HONG KONG  
**DIGNITY**  
INSTITUTE  
香港守護尊嚴中心

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023


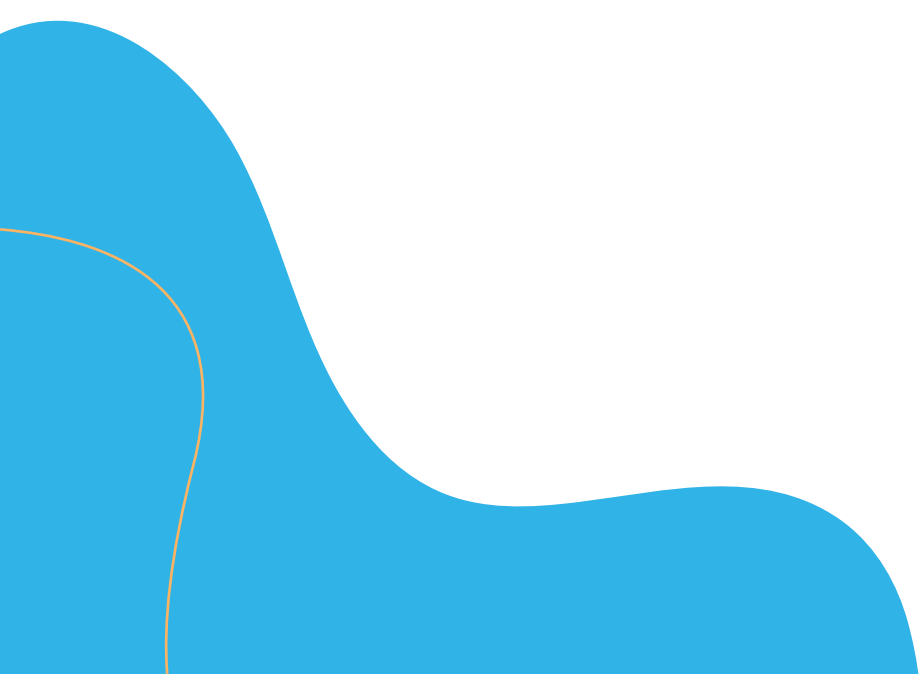
*Restoring dignity to the most vulnerable in Hong Kong, and going deep to address the systems of exploitation that perpetuate these abuses.*



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# LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear supporters, partners, and friends,

One of my favorite sayings is a Farsi poem: “Qatra qatra, darya mesha,” which means: “Drop by drop, the river is formed.” This past year exemplifies this idea perfectly, and it is with immense gratitude and humility that I reflect upon the recoveries and successes that form our river of flourishing, drop by drop at Hong Kong Dignity Institute.

***‘Drop by drop, the river is formed.’***

The end of 2022 saw the milestone of Hong Kong Dignity Institute being granted charitable status; 2023 grew from this with new avenues of fundraising and support opening. This has been instrumental in propelling our mission forward and ensuring the sustainability of our initiatives. I am thrilled to share that our first-ever ‘Let Dignity Bloom’ Gala proved to be beautiful and inspiring, and also an extraordinary success. Through the unwavering support of you, our supporters, we raised a huge \$2.5 million, which has allowed us to expand our expert team and professionalise our programmes and structures.

Our work has yielded ground breaking results in the fight against human trafficking. You may recall the moving account of a client who came through our doors requesting assistance in exiting her marriage. I am thrilled to report that she WON her landmark case, resulting in the first-ever annulment of a forced marriage in Hong Kong.



This victory brought justice for our brave client and set a historic precedent for women’s rights. Her victory represents a critical piece in the puzzle to create legislation criminalising all forms of human trafficking in Hong Kong. This case marks a significant step forward in our collective pursuit of justice and equality.

In further legal and advocacy efforts, we have witnessed the release of several clients from wrongful detention. Our organization has filed several judicial reviews and one habeas corpus in 2023, effectively challenging and rectifying unjust systems that perpetuate human trafficking and exploitation.

At the start of 2023, we questioned how to keep our doors open, but now we are looking to expand our team and services! Looking back, it is both awe-inspiring and humbling to see how far we

***‘Looking back, it is both awe-inspiring and humbling to see how far we have come.’***

have come. This remarkable transformation would not have been possible without the unwavering support and belief of our donors, partners, and supporters. People like Nicole Chik, one of our youngest supporters, demonstrated incredible resilience and commitment by participating in the La Marathon du Sable, an ultra-marathon across the Sahara Desert. Her selfless act raised awareness and funds for our cause, showcasing the power of individual determination in creating meaningful change.

I joined as Executive Director midway through 2023. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my predecessor, Melissa Tan, for putting her trust in me, to take up the mantle of leading this fantastic organization. I have long admired the work of the Hong Kong Dignity Institute, and it is with a great sense of humility and purpose that I assume this position.

As we embark together into 2024, we are filled with renewed vigor and determination to continue the good fight against human trafficking. Together, we can create a world where every individual is free from the shackles of exploitation and can live a life of empowerment and dignity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jennifer Moberg Pforte".

**Jennifer Moberg Pforte**  
Executive Director





# VISION, MISSION AND VALUES



## OUR VISION



The restoration of dignity to the most vulnerable in Hong Kong and reformation of the systems of exploitation that perpetuate these abuses.

## OUR MISSION



Under one roof, to provide actionable solutions to victims of exploitation, abuse, and discrimination through a professional, integrated and collaborative approach.

## OUR VALUES



We are guided by principles of speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of those who are destitute.



# IMPACT



237 Counselling Sessions

388 Hours of Legal Work

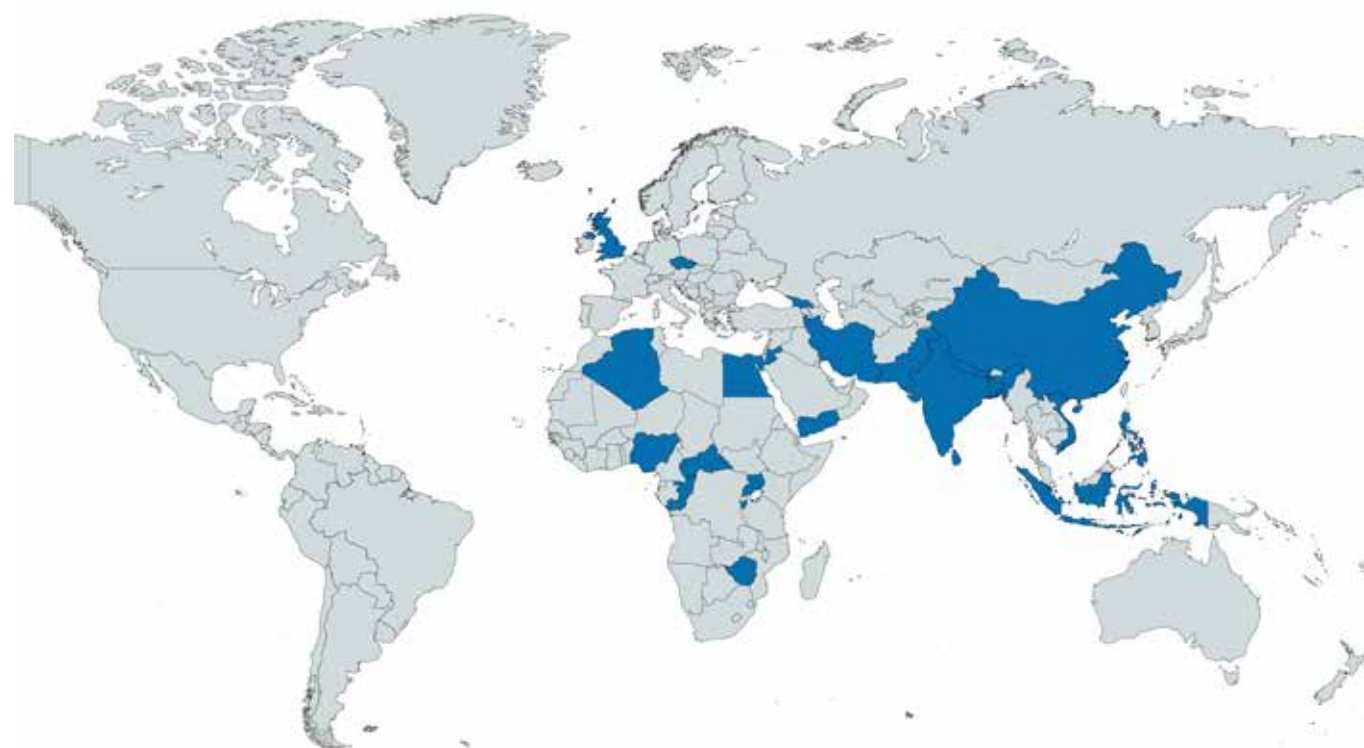


254 Hours of Psychosocial Assistance



155 People Served  
from 27 Countries  
(32% Children)

Map showing country of origin for the 155 people we have served



# MARCEL'S STORY

Marcel\* is from Madagascar. For many years, he has worked as a mechanic as well as a bus and taxi driver to provide for his wife Ana and his two sons. In 2018, he began working in a neighbouring country for an employer known to him as Andre. Not too long after he started working for Andre, he was instructed to carry a suitcase of tortoises to Hong Kong.

Andre told him that there was no problem in taking the tortoises to Hong Kong and arranged the flight for Marcel. He also let him know that he made preparations for someone to pick Marcel up when he arrived in Hong Kong.

Upon arrival at the Hong Kong airport, Marcel was apprehended by immigration officers who held him while his luggage was checked. He was arrested for trafficking endangered species and realised that he had been deceived by his employer. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

***'[He] realised that he had been deceived by his employer...'***

Andre was furious when he discovered that Marcel was not able to successfully carry out the transport of the tortoises to his business partners in Hong Kong, resulting in large financial loss for Andre. To take revenge, Andre, who is a well-connected and wealthy businessman in Madagascar, began harassing Marcel's wife Ana and his two sons. He framed Ana, causing her to be falsely imprisoned by the Malagasy authorities in order to conceal his illicit business operations.

***'He framed Ana, causing her to be falsely imprisoned...'***



Marcel himself received death threats. Knowing that he would face serious harm if he returned to Madagascar, Marcel made an application to receive non-refoulement protection in Hong Kong. Sadly, his application was rejected and the immigration department detained him pending removal.

HKDI took steps to not only achieve his release from detention but also to protect Marcel and the rest of his family from further harm. This included submitting additional information strengthening his claim for protection from removal as well as requesting a screening to assess if he was a victim of trafficking and required assistance as such. We are still waiting on the relevant decisions from the authorities.

*\*Identity Protected*

# HIGHLIGHTS



## #1 LANDMARK JUDGEMENT FOR FORCED MARRIAGE

On 20 March 2023, the Hong Kong courts handed down a landmark judgment impacting the legal landscape of forced marriage in Hong Kong. The case of our client RM\* marks the first nullity (divorce) of a forced marriage in Hong Kong, a legal decision advancing the rights of women in Hong Kong who have been coerced into marriage against their will. It was also the first Sharia marriage divorce. HKDI continues to explore ways to advocate for the criminalisation of forced marriage in Hong Kong.

*\*Identity Protected*



## #2 FIRST JUDICIAL REVIEW APPLICATION SEEKING RESIDENCY FOR REFUGEES

As of now, there are no pathways to residency for recognised refugees in Hong Kong. Unable to return to their home country for fear of persecution and often never resettled by UNHCR, they have to spend years trying to make ends meet, and their potential to meaningfully contribute to the city's economy as residents are wasted. Instead, they live a life in limbo like Alan\* and his family (see client story on page 16).

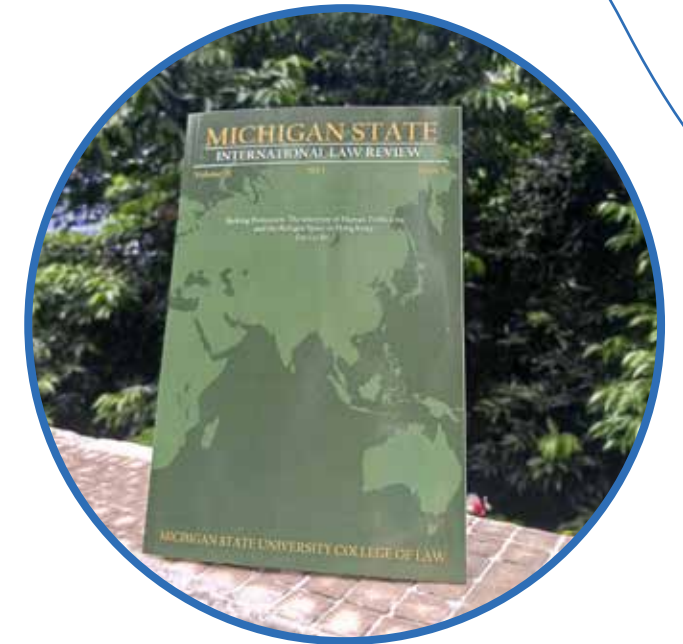
HKDI engaged a partner law firm to help Alan's family to challenge the Immigration Department's decision to make them perpetually liable to detention and removal despite having been recognized as successful claimants and having stayed in Hong Kong for 22 years. You can only imagine the disastrous effects the pending removal orders have on their children's, let alone their own, mental health. If successful, this is the first judicial review application that may help successful claimants in Hong Kong to establish local identities.

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## #3 PUBLICATION IN MICHIGAN STATE INTERNATIONAL LAW REVIEW

In July 2023, the Michigan State International Law Review published Patricia Ho's article 'Seeking Protection: The Interplay of Human Trafficking and the Refugee Space in Hong Kong'. The article discusses how, for a lack of better protection mechanisms, victims of human trafficking often seek protection under the USM (Unified Screening Mechanism), Hong Kong's system to assess non-refoulement claims.

Without bespoke legislation criminalising all forms of human trafficking, victims rarely dare to disclose details of their trafficking experience because, they *'almost always bear the brunt of the risk of self-incrimination because even if immunity can be negotiated, it is often limited, and offered at a stage after the individual has provided substantive information'* (p.509).



## #4 TATLER FRONT & FEMALE AWARD

In recognition of her outstanding work to advance women's rights in Hong Kong, our founder, Patricia Ho, was awarded the Front & Female Awards Hong Kong, organised by Tatler.





# GALA: *Let Dignity Bloom*

Our inaugural ‘*Let Dignity Bloom*’ Gala was held at the Aberdeen Marina Club on 1 June 2023. We were delighted by the number of friends and supporters who joined us in celebrating the stories of change and hope of our clients.

We were also able to raise over \$2.5 million from the generous donations given on the night. Our tremendous thanks again to everyone who joined us and to Jill Vidal, Jing Wong, Felix and all of the performers on the evening.



Photos provided by: Enoch Ho and Elly Tang





*'I support HKDI because HKDI is client-centered. HKDI keeps humanity at the heart of everything it does: serving clients, educating students, and raising awareness.'* – Donor



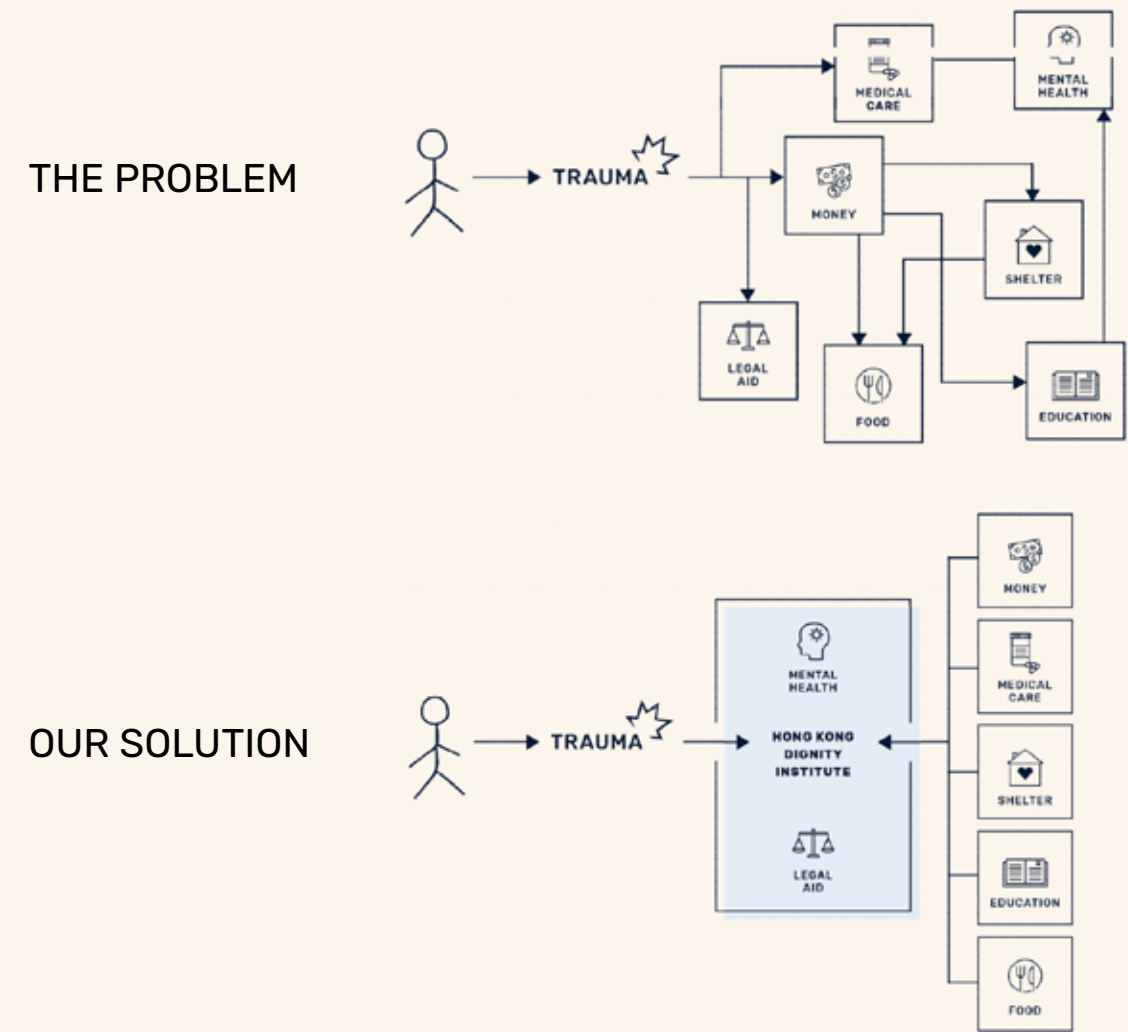
Photos provided by: Enoch Ho and Elly Tang





# CLIENT SERVICES

Through HKDI's integrated interdisciplinary services, our clients receive qualified legal counsel and representation, and the mental health support they need to understand the trauma that underpins their situation. Our expert team collaborates across disciplines to understand each client's needs and develop a care and action plan tailored to provide recourse at one time, in one place.



## CONSULTATION MATTERS

- Human Trafficking
- Forced Marriage
- Sexual Violence
- Domestic Abuse
- Child Abuse
- Drug Trafficking
- Wrongful Imprisonment
- Asylum Claims
- Refugee Resettlement
- Statelessness
- Family Reunification
- Immigration Detention
- Fraud
- Divorce
- Parentage / Custody
- Dependent / Humanitarian Visa
- Access to Education for Asylum Seekers
- Establishing a Business as a Refugee
- Conditional Discharge
- Forced Hospitalisation
- Welfare Assistance



## SOLOMON'S STORY

Solomon grew up in a small village in Nigeria. Before he was born, his father got into a land dispute with neighbouring villagers, who later killed Solomon's mother and four of his siblings. One night, Solomon was brutally attacked with metal objects, to the point that he suffered from a skull fracture. The attack left Solomon hospitalised for five months and with a three-year paralysis on the left side of his body. Solomon is still suffering from the long-term effects of the attacks: short-term memory loss and cognitive impairment.

In 2010, Solomon fled to Hong Kong, where he met his wife Dora, a local Hong Kong resident, who works as a clerk in the Medical Department of the Hospital Authority. Together they are raising four young children, all under four years of age. Unfortunately, their children need extensive medical care, for a host of congenital and acute conditions.

On top of their plight, Solomon's dependent visa application was rejected, meaning that if Solomon's non-refoulement claim does not succeed at the final stage of the legal proceedings, he would be forced to separate from his family. It's unimaginable for Solomon to be apart from his children but it would be equally catastrophic if the family were to move to Nigeria, given the risks to his security, and the absence of health care for his children's

medical needs. Due to the repeated rejection and ongoing legal proceedings, Dora has developed depression and experiences high levels of stress and anxiety.

***'It's unimaginable for Solomon to be apart from his children...'***

Since his non-refoulement claim was rejected at the initial stages of the proceedings, HKDI assisted him in gathering new evidence (such as medical records of his head injury) and collaborated with a partner law firm to lodge a subsequent claim. The family is now currently waiting for the decision from the Director of Immigration. HKDI also provides counselling services for Dora and Solomon. Solomon's case shows the difficulties faced by asylum seekers who have families in Hong Kong, and the strenuous task of having to succeed in being granted protection by Hong Kong.

If further funding becomes available, HKDI will be able to help Solomon and families like him explore ways to keep their families together, including obtaining evidence from experts to support their applications for protection, and putting the best case forward so that they could stay safe and whole in Hong Kong.



## ALAN'S STORY

Alan\*, his wife, and their four children (7-19 years old), had to leave their home country in North Africa to escape persecution from community members of the majority religion there. The Hong Kong government recognized the imminent risk of persecution if they were to be returned to their country, and granted them non-refoulement protection - luckily forming part of the 1% success rate in Hong Kong.

***'[They] had to leave their home country in North Africa to escape persecution...'***

Unfortunately, the 'protection' only goes so far, and the family's chance for resettlement was foreclosed when UNHCR decided against their application. This means they are not treated as 'residents' and without HKID cards, the family will remain in limbo, never belonging anywhere. This has caused significant emotional distress to every member of the family, including the young children, who find themselves living perpetually as outcasts without residency status in this city.

On top of the problems the family is already facing, Alan was recently tricked into an online scam that left him losing more than HKD 200,000 - money that he had borrowed from a friend, and is now trying to repay over decades of his life.

***'The family will remain in limbo, never belonging anywhere...'***



HKDI has been assisting Alan and his family to apply for residency on a humanitarian basis. When the authorities decided that they will not consider granting residency to them, we helped the family to prepare a judicial review application to ask the courts to consider this catch-22 situation, and are helping the family to obtain representation for those proceedings.

HKDI also assisted the family to discover the online scam, advised them to make a police report, and helped them to access medical care and social support for their children. HKDI also provided counselling for Alan's eldest daughter and is working with her school to provide an ADHD assessment.

*\*Identity Protected*

## BINITA'S STORY

Binita\* had previously worked as a beautician in South Asia, and was difficult financial and family circumstances. She was introduced to a seemingly wealthy and respectable job consultant, Farah, who offered to arrange work for her in Hong Kong - in exchange for an agency fee of HKD 6,700 — Binita's life savings.

On the day of Binita's flight to Hong Kong, Farah dropped a bag with what seemed to be household/ beauty products at her door, asking Binita to do her a favour and bring the bag to her relatives in Hong Kong, turning Binita into an unknowing drug mule.

Upon arrival, Binita was intercepted at customs of Hong Kong International Airport. The officers found ca. 1.4 kg of cocaine hidden in the bars of soap (smelt like soap too) and cosmetics boxes within her suitcase. She was convicted to more than 24 years of imprisonment.

***'She was convicted to more than 24 years of imprisonment.'***

Like many other vulnerable individuals caught in global drug trafficking schemes, she - and another trafficker - had to bear the punishment of the criminal operation.

HKDI, together with counsel Albert Wong, Patricia Ho & Associates, and with students from the Refugee & Human Trafficking Clinic in the Faculty of Law at the University of Hong Kong, assisted Binita to prepare a judicial review to challenge the authorities' decision not to classify her as a victim of trafficking, without disclosing any reasons for this decision.

***'... to challenge the authorities' decision not to classify her as a victim of trafficking'***

On 24 March 2023, permission to launch a judicial review was granted (first stage) and the case is now pending judgement.

HKDI continues to support Binita as friends as she struggles through the uncertainties of the legal cases. If further funding becomes available, HKDI would be able to seek official evaluations from psychiatrists to help assess her mental health and present that information to the authorities. Funding would also help her to potentially obtain expert reports from international human trafficking experts.

*\*Identity Protected*





# ENGAGEMENT & EVENTS

## MARCH - APRIL

### Film Screenings and Fireside Chats of *'The Sunny Side of the Street': Illustrating the Lives of Refugees in Hong Kong*

HKDI presented a number of exclusive screenings of *The Sunny Side of the Street* directed by Lau Kok Rui, which showcases compelling previews into the lives of refugees in Hong Kong. The film tells the story of a Hong Kong-born Pakistani asylum seeker boy who forms an unexpected bond with a local taxi driver. It has won Best Leading Actor, Best New Director and best Original Screenplay in the Golden Horse Awards 2022.

The screenings were followed by fireside chats with the director Lau Kok Rui, Patricia Ho, and other HKDI team members who explained in greater detail the difficulties faced by refugees in Hong Kong and answered the questions of the audience.

## 16 MARCH

### CNN My Freedom Day

Patricia Ho was interviewed by CNN correspondent Kristie Lu Stout on the topic of the prevalence of cyber scams in Asia and the significant overlap with the criminality of trafficking in persons. In the interview, Patricia encouraged the enactment of a victim-centred approach in Hong Kong that grants immunity to victims rather than a system that penalises victims that were under duress.

## 31 JANUARY

### Eden: Legality of Sex Work in Hong Kong

Patricia Ho and Rebekka Chen provided training to outreach volunteers of Eden who regularly meet with sex workers in Hong Kong. The training covered sex work-related offences, relevant case law concerning the security of sex workers as well as rights of sex workers when facing police or immigration officers.



## 8 APRIL

### Chinese University Hong Kong Model United Nations: *Human Trafficking and Forced Migration*

As part of the CUHK MUN, Ashlynn Ong provided the students with relevant background knowledge on forced migration and human trafficking matters in Hong Kong, supplementing the students' learning about international law with a local perspective.

## 2 MAY

### Foreign Correspondents Club: *"Dream job" nightmare: Asian Professionals Trafficked by Cyber-scammers*

As part of an expert panel, Patricia Ho was invited to shed light on the fast-growing number of victims trafficked to Southeast Asian countries where they are forced to work as cyber criminals. The panel discussion was hosted by the Foreign Correspondents Club and moderated by CNN's Kristie Lu Strout.



## 3 JULY

### Radio RTHK: *Radio For Good*

RTHK reporter Noreen Mir interviewed Melissa Tan about the work of HKDI. Melissa explained how HKDI's interdisciplinary approach, combining legal and psychosocial services under one roof, allows victims of trafficking, refugees, and other vulnerable groups to better navigate Hong Kong's fragmented support system.



## 5 JULY

### Withers and HKDI: *Understanding how to help friends and families experiencing forced marriage or domestic violence*

In an interactive training session, Patricia Ho, Puja Kapai (HKU Associate Professor of Faculty of Law, Convenor of Women's Studies Research Centre), Evelyn Tsao (Public Interest Lawyer and Partner of Patricia Ho & Associates) and Anisha Ramanathan (Partner of Withers Hong Kong) discussed the current situation concerning forced marriages and domestic violence in Hong Kong.

They also shared practical tips in terms of protecting one's rights and safety, the domestic and cohabitation relationships violence ordinance, and organisations and professionals they can reach out to for help, protection, and remedy.

Invitation

Withers x Hong Kong Dignity Institute Event:  
Understanding how to help friends and families experiencing forced marriage or domestic violence

[Register Here](#)

\*All women are welcome\*

5 July 2023 Wednesday  
HKT 5:00 - 7:30pm

Withers  
30/F, United Centre,  
95 Queensway, Hong Kong ([Map](#))

Agenda (HKT)  
5:00 pm Registration  
5:30 pm Sharing session

Speakers

- Patricia Ho  
Founder  
Hong Kong Dignity Institute
- Puja Kapai  
Associate Professor  
HKU
- Evelyn Tsao  
Partner  
Patricia Ho & Associates
- Anisha Ramanathan  
Senior Associate  
Withers

There have long been research studies and community concerns raised by various sectors in Hong Kong, indicating that forced marriage and domestic violence are real and existing problems and that these issues are experienced differently in ethnic minority communities. While some legal headways are made to resolve the problem, the situation remains challenging given the unique circumstances that arise in the particular context and culture of the community.

In this session, Patricia Ho, Founder of Hong Kong Dignity Institute and Principal Lecturer of Faculty of Law, HKU; Puja Kapai, Associate Professor of Faculty of Law, Convenor of Women's Studies Research Centre, HKU; Evelyn Tsao, Public Interest Lawyer and Partner of Patricia Ho & Associates and Anisha Ramanathan, Senior Associate of Withers Hong Kong family team will discuss the current situation concerning forced marriages and domestic violence in Hong Kong. They will also share practical tips in terms of protecting one's rights and safety; the domestic and cohabitation relationships violence ordinance; and organizations and professionals they can reach out to for help, protection and remedy.

Should you wish to attend this event, please [click here](#) to register your interest.

Organizers  
[withersworldwide](#)

HONG KONG DIGNITY INSTITUTE



# CONTINUED

29 JULY

## World Day Against Trafficking in Persons Event by STOP, Eden, & HKDI: From Victim to Survivor

In a panel and discussion moderated by Jennifer Pforte, STOP, Eden, and HKDI discussed pathways to remedy for victims of human trafficking. Rebekka Chen shared practical steps on filing a police report, securing evidence, and avenues to seek legal redress.



22 AUGUST

## National Autonomous University of Mexico: Human Trafficking and Forced Labour - Sociological Analysis of Perpetrator

Patricia Ho gave a lecture to students of the Online Diploma on Human Trafficking and Forced Labour within the framework of the Regional Conference on Migration. She shared her expertise and provided insights into our work in Hong Kong with South American practitioners working in the anti-human trafficking space.



16 SEPTEMBER

## Cambridge University Hong Kong and China Affairs Society: Reflections on Discrimination and Inclusivity

Invited to speak in a panel for the Annual Youth Conference of the society, Patricia Ho shared her insights on discrimination and inclusivity, drawing from her wealth of experience as a lawyer working on matters concerning disability discrimination and other forms of discrimination.



4 OCTOBER

## Radio RTHK: Challenges of Setting Up an Impact Organisation

Patricia Ho was invited to speak about her experiences in setting up HKDI. She spoke about the vision behind HKDI as well as the challenges she had to overcome to succeed.



19 OCTOBER

## CEDAR Fund: Human Trafficking in Hong Kong

Jennifer Pforte and Patricia Ho provided a presentation on the different forms of human trafficking in Hong Kong as well as relevant case law strengthening the position of victims of human trafficking while highlighting the shortcomings in the current multi-legislation approach.

20 OCTOBER

## Hong Kong University Model United Nations: Risk of Statelessness for Non-refoulement Claimants

Organised by one of HKDI's Student Ambassadors, Angel Wu, UN representatives and NGO practitioners were invited to provide international and local perspectives on the topic of statelessness. Rebekka Chen offered training on the risk of statelessness faced by many children of non-refoulement claimants in Hong Kong.

9 NOVEMBER

## Asia Racing Federation: How Organised Crime Operates Illegal Betting, Cyber Scams & Modern Slavery in Southeast Asia

Patricia Ho explained in her presentation how Hong Kong's most marginalised are easily targeted by cyber scammers, causing them to lose the little resources they have. She also shared how traffickers recruit their victims globally through fraudulent job advertisements.





# CONTINUED

27 NOVEMBER

## Multistakeholder Pledges on Global Compact on Refugee, Global Compact for Migration, and Legal Community Pledge in the Asia Pacific Region: *Refugee Protection in Hong Kong*

UNHCR's Regional Bureau (Asia Pacific), in conjunction with IOM, UNICEF, the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, the International Detention Coalition (IDC), and PILnet hosted a webinar in preparation for the Global Refugee Forum.

Relevant stakeholders were asked to share best practices from their respective region. Patricia Ho was invited to speak about progress and the challenges of Hong Kong's non-refoulement regime.

25 NOVEMBER

## 24 Hour Race

Jennifer Moberg Pforte was invited to speak at the 24 Hour Race, an annual student-led initiative raising awareness for regional anti-trafficking efforts. She spoke about HKDI's work to hundreds of Hong Kong secondary school students who joined together to run a 24 hour fundraising relay around the Peak.



13-15 DECEMBER

## Global Refugee Forum: *Legal Community Pledge Hong Kong*

Co-convened by five States – Colombia, France, Japan, Jordan and Uganda, and co-hosted by the Government of Switzerland and UNHCR, the 2023 Global Refugee Forum gathered participants from 168 countries. Patricia Ho was invited to introduce HKDI's anti-trafficking multi-stakeholder pledge to the GRF and share about HKDI's efforts in the field.

# CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Supported by the Swire Group Charitable Trust and in collaboration with the University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law, HKDI hosted three university courses for undergraduate and postgraduate students: Refugee and Human Trafficking Clinic, Disability Rights Practice and Human Rights in Practice.

Our goal is to empower students and the next generation of legal, mental health and social work practitioners to learn through an interdisciplinary approach, gaining first hand experience in adopting trauma-informed approaches when working with clients and preventing the pigeon-holing of expertise. Through HKDI's integrated services model, students conduct hands on legal research, analysis and drafting in collaboration with barristers, counselors and external organizations.



***'I was able to actually make a difference by participating in real legal casework e.g. conducting client interviews and drafting documents. I am grateful that HKDI has provided me this unique opportunity to make an impact in the community, and help those in need.'*** – Student



In 2023, more than 80 students were trained in the clinical legal education programmes which conducted two research projects to dive into the quality of asylum claim appeal decisions, to assess the effectiveness and fairness of the decision-making process that many of our vulnerable clients go through. As an extension of the *Modus Operandi of Sex and Drug Trafficking in Hong Kong* project, students utilised artificial intelligence programming, created by Daniel Cheng, to analyse and examine judgments of those convicted of trafficking in dangerous drugs to map out patterns between custom profiles and trafficking conditions.

 SWIRE TRUST

 香港大學  
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG





## LAYLA'S STORY

Layla\* is from Egypt. Her husband's connections with the Muslim Brotherhood made him, Layla, and their daughters a target of opposing political actors ever since their children were little. Eventually, they had to flee their country and came to Hong Kong to seek protection from political persecution.

In Hong Kong - while safe from harm based on the husband's political affiliations - Layla and her daughters had to face a more immediate threat: intensifying physical violence inflicted by Layla's husband. His frequent outbursts resulted in burns, bruises, and visible scars all over their bodies. Eventually, Layla managed to get a divorce but the harassment from her ex-husband continued.

Layla and her daughters have entered and exited Hong Kong on two occasions in the past, each time owing to regime change in Egypt and/or to flee from domestic violence. Due to the frequent movement between the two places, the Immigration Department denied their request to make a subsequent claim for protection upon their last entry in Hong Kong. The prospect of potentially having to return to Egypt was devastating.

### ***'They had to flee their country and came to Hong Kong...'***

When her ex-husband heard that Layla had remarried, he applied for custody of the daughters. This was especially concerning since he threatened the daughters with forced (child) marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

HKDI engaged a partner law firm to assist the family in seeking protection on an urgent basis by preparing the substantive submissions in support of their judicial review application. Because the family was not afforded any social welfare support from the International Social Services (ISS) for more than a year, Layla and her daughters suffered great hardships.

HKDI supported Layla and her daughters with arranging shelter options, advocating for the waiving of medical fees for urgent hospital care, and strategic referrals to other NGO partners. Layla has also been receiving counselling services to address her severe depression, which was exacerbated by the lack of adequate welfare support and the instability of her family's status in Hong Kong. To raise greater awareness of the family's plight, HKDI also spoke with reporters of the South China Morning Post which featured Layla's story.

*\*Identity Protected*

## THE WONGS' STORY

The Wong\* siblings were born in Mainland China. At a young age, their mother sold them to traffickers who shipped them to Hong Kong to work as child labourers. As young children in a foreign city, the Wong siblings were left to fend for themselves while suffering exploitation. The siblings spent their lives without any social or institutional support, but managed to eventually earn enough money to survive on their own.

Despite their parents' abandonment, the siblings did not forget their mother and arranged for her to live in Hong Kong with them. The siblings supported their mother financially, but she squandered their hard-earned savings to pay for her drinking and gambling habits. To put a stop to her addiction, the siblings refused to give their mother any more money. Their mother got very angry and vindictive. She contacted a local non-profit organisation making false accusations that her children had threatened to butcher her and set the house on fire. Without verifying her complaint and despite knowing of the mother's addiction, the non-profit called for police intervention.

In an unfortunate turn of events, the siblings were misguided by a social worker who made them believe that as long as they went along with the police, their mother would be sent to rehabilitation to help her quit alcohol. Quickly after, the siblings found themselves "voluntarily" admitted to a hospital and they underwent forced hospitalisation in a psychiatric ward.

The tragic story of the Wong siblings is a story of how the city has failed them. Trafficked and exploited at an early age, the siblings were victims who had no recourse to support, protection and rehabilitation from their trauma. The Wong siblings are now almost 60 years old. They have spent most of their lives lost, helpless and exhausted, but HKDI is trying to lessen their load.

### ***'They have spent most of their lives lost, helpless and exhausted...'***

HKDI are now assisting them in obtaining legal advice to explore ways to address the system's failure, so that others do not need to go through the same ordeal. HKDI is also liaising with another NGO called Concord throughout this process, so as to identify and address the common grievances faced by sufferers of mental illness.

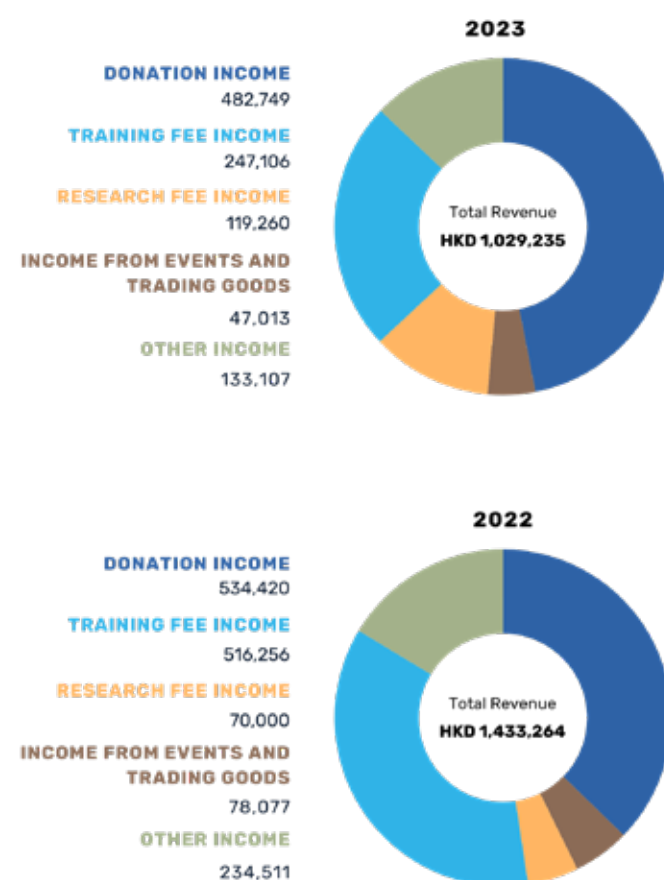
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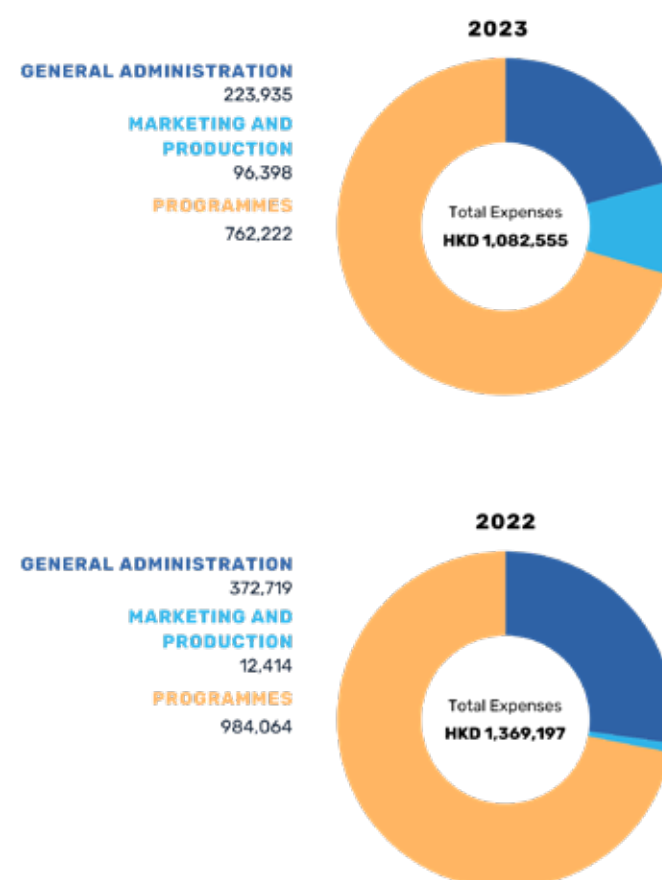


# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## REVENUE



## EXPENSES



## INCOME STATEMENT

	2023 HKD	2022 HKD
Revenue	927,628	1,346,809
Other income	<u>101,607</u>	<u>86,455</u>
	1,029,235	1,433,264
Administrative expenses	<u>(1,082,555)</u>	<u>(1,369,197)</u>
(Loss)/Profit before tax	(53,320)	64,067
Income tax expense	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
(Loss)/Profit for the year	<u>(53,320)</u>	<u>64,067</u>

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2023

### ASSETS

	2023 HKD	2022 HKD
<b>Current assets</b>		
Rental and other deposits	55,300	55,300
Account receivable	2,010	-
Cash and cash equivalents	<u>62,898</u>	<u>276,820</u>
<b>Total assets</b>	<u>120,208</u>	<u>332,120</u>

### EQUITY

<b>Equity attributable to the owners of the Company</b>		
Share capital		
Issued and fully paid: 10,000 ordinary shares	10,000	10,000
Accumulated losses	<u>(172,327)</u>	<u>(119,007)</u>
<b>Total deficit on shareholder's equity</b>	<u>(162,327)</u>	<u>(109,007)</u>

### LIABILITIES

<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Amount due to director	235,000	240,000
Rental deposit received	-	34,000
Accruals and other payable	<u>47,535</u>	<u>167,127</u>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<u>282,535</u>	<u>441,127</u>
<b>Total equity and liabilities</b>	<u>120,208</u>	<u>332,120</u>

The financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023 set out above were audited by Union Power HK CPA Limited and does not include revenue from the Let Dignity Bloom Gala held on 1 June 2023. The full set of financial statements can be made available upon request.



# MEET OUR TEAM

## STAFF



**Patricia Ho**  
*Founder*



**Jennifer Moberg Pforte**  
*Executive Director*



**Deborah Measor**  
*Operations Manager*



**Rebekka Fielder**  
*Casework & Research Manager*



**Jessie Paradise**  
*Communications Officer*

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Patricia Ho**  
*Managing Partner, Patricia Ho & Associates;  
Principal Lecturer, Faculty of Law at HKU*

**Melissa Tan**  
*Former Executive Director, Hong Kong Dignity  
Institute; Founder, Headland Intelligence*

**Sky Siu**  
*Executive Director, KELY Support Group  
Founding Member, Voice for Social Good*

**Edwin Northover**  
*Head of Financial Institutions and Corporate  
Practices, Debevoise & Plimpton*

**Erin Hung**  
*Artist; Writer; Mental Health Awareness Advocate*

**Tammy Wan**  
*Board member, Li Po Chun United World College*

## COUNSELLING TEAM



**Alli Ruttger**  
*Trauma Therapist*



**Jessica Richmond Choy**  
*Psychotherapist*



**Bea Smith**  
*Placement Counsellor*



**Hedy Bok**  
*Placement Counsellor*

## HONG KONG UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

**Ashlynn Ong**  
*Education Programme Manager*

**Daniel Cheng**  
*Senior Research Assistant*

## VOLUNTEER



**Angus Lau**  
*Legal Volunteer*



# STUDENT AMBASSADORS & SUPPORTERS

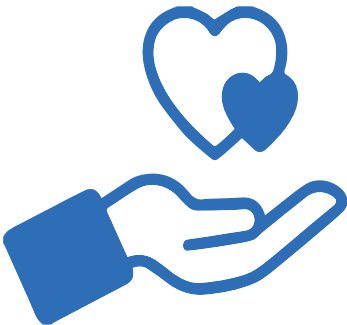
## STUDENT AMBASSADORS

Having launched our Student Ambassador Programme around one year ago, our team of young and talented ambassadors is growing quickly! HKDI provides high school and undergraduate university students between the ages of 16 and 22 years with training on core topics HKDI is working on. We invite the students to develop innovative fundraising and awareness-raising campaigns around refugee and human trafficking work in Hong Kong. We currently have, among others, Ambassadors from Renaissance College, Victoria Shanghai Academy, West Island School and the University in Hong Kong.



## SUPPORTERS

2023 was an important year for Hong Kong Dignity Institute in terms of our fundraising capacity. Despite how young we are as an NGO and the fragile post-COVID economic climate, we were still able to kick-start our fundraising campaigns with great success. This included generating support from foundations, corporations, and individual donors. We also hosted our first-ever charity Gala, and saw community fundraisers take on sporting challenges to raise awareness for our cause.



# FUTURE PLANS

## EXPAND PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICES

In 2024 we plan to expand our psychosocial services, with the hiring of a permanent in-house counsellor, revamping our trauma-informed-care counselling room, and implementation of an upgraded client management system.



## ANTI-TRAFFICKING FOCUS

Next year, we also reaffirm our commitment to focused anti-trafficking work, with special attention to victims of forced marriage and victims of trafficking for the purpose of forced criminal activity.



## RESEARCH

Our two seminal research works: Trafficking in Dangerous Drugs, and the Commercial Sex Industry in Hong Kong, have converged into one massive investigation into Human Trafficking at the intersection of these two. We aim to complete this pioneering work and publish it as a book in the coming year.



## BRING ON 2024!



# OUR PARTNERS



*'If you want to go fast, go alone;  
if you want to go far, go together.'*





## CONTACT US

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-  +852 9728 5969
-  [info@dignityinstitute.com](mailto:info@dignityinstitute.com)
-  [dignityinstitute.com](http://dignityinstitute.com)