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Subject : Complaint Letter regarding Racialised Reporting of COVID-19

To whom it may concern,

We hope this letter finds you well.

You must be aware of the recent article, published on the 18th January 2021, originally headlined "*Hong Kong Fourth Wave : Officials warn members of Ethnic Minorities helping spread Covid-19 as another 107 cases emerge*" that has caused an outrage in our community. We are writing to ask that you 1) **publicly apologise** and condemn racist portrayals of minority groups in Hong Kong, and 2) set up a **cultural sensitivity training** for your employees to combat the reportings of news that perpetuate racial stereotypes and 3) a **constructive change** in the ways that the South China Morning Post reports news related to ethnic minorities.

SCMP's deliberate choice of emphasizing "South Asians", "Nepalese", "Indian" and "Ethnic Minorities" and claiming they are "helping spread the virus" has subjected the ethnic minority community under racist attacks and alienation from society. Quotes from the article include "residents mostly of South Asian descent are contributing to the spread of the disease" and "they had many family gatherings with fellow countrymen". While we understand that some of the quotes are directly from *Raymond Ho Lei-ming*, the head of the health promotion branch at the Centre for Health Protection and *Dr Chuang Shuk-Kwan*, the head of the centre's communicable disease branch, it is evident that the article had a clear motive behind **selecting specific racist remarks, using them as clickbait titles and scapegoating an entire community**.

Other local newspapers such as *TheStandard* have reported the **same news** regarding Covid-19 cases in Yau Tsim Mong district and **quoted the same officials**, but have managed to keep the public updated with Covid-19 in a *neutral* tone **without any emphasis on race**. They did not include any racist quotes from the officials nor blamed the ethnic minority community. Conversely, SCMP has purposely nitpicked the racist remarks that serve only to blame and single out a minority community.

There is a clear difference in the ways that SCMP writes about Covid-19 clusters in Hong Kong when it comes to the EM community. Reports of previous clusters never mentioned race or put the sole blame on the kinds of groups that were contributing to the spread of the virus. Hence, we ask, why is there a difference in the way SCMP reports the recent clusters? In previous articles reporting on the dance cluster, SCMP has repeatedly used the word "cluster" to explicate what caused the cases to rise rather

than naming a particular group or their race. Thus, it can be seen that SCMP *knows* how to avoid racialising and blaming a particular group in the rise of Covid-19 cases.

The racialisation of the recent cluster through the media has constructed a racial theme that scapegoats and places marginalised communities at risk of hate and biased treatment. Since the article was published, many members of the minority communities have experienced racism at their workplaces and in public. A case in point would be the recent experience of a Deliveroo rider, who recounted that a customer explicitly stated that she did not want an “Indian or Pakistani rider” delivering her food. Another example would be that of Nepali construction workers who were asked not to return to work while their Chinese colleagues resumed work. Furthermore, a Nepali citizen was sprayed with disinfectant by her colleague at the workplace in fear of Covid-19. This is how SCMP has perpetuated microaggressions through the racialised reporting and how these microaggressions have had a macro impact on the minority communities.

Apart from the poor reporting of the news about the pandemic, using terms such as “Ethnic Minorities” in a derogatory manner, or targeting specific members of the community has been a **recurring theme** in many of the previous SCMP articles. SCMP reporting crimes committed by members of the EM community have often highlighted their race and vilified them while evading the mention of race of crimes committed by members of the majority ethnic group in Hong Kong.

This is not the first time this has happened. Several news articles published by SCMP have shown recurrent racial themes and emphasizing on the ethnicities. Some examples are “String of violent street brawls prompts Hong Kong police crackdown on **South Asian gang hang-outs**” (Published on 2 May 2017), “**Nepali asylum seeker** gets two months in jail for stealing rice packets from Hong Kong store” (Published 30 March 2020), and “Hong Kong suspect dies day after police used ‘appropriate force’ during his arrest” (Published 10 May 2020), in which the article highlighted the “criminal damage and drug possessions” of the “**non-chinese**” victim in the subheading. Crime reporting in SCMP has a recurring racial theme that has fostered fear against ethnic minorities and created an implicit bias towards them as a danger to society. As a distinguished and trusted media, the choice of words and deliberate use of “ethnic minorities” highlighted in articles have a detrimental repercussion on the livelihood and experiences of ethnic minority communities.

It is disappointing to see that journalistic values, which aim to report the truth, have taken the back seat, and resulted in the distortion of truth in order to monetize racism for reader engagement. It is appalling to see the media profit off of existing racist beliefs for their own personal agendas, and incite fear and segregation of the vulnerable

communities in our society. Let's not pretend that SCMP has never facilitated microaggressions towards ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. We would like SCMP to take concrete steps to combat racism within the institution. We demand 1) a **public apology**, 2) **cultural sensitivity training** to your employees to combat the news reporting that perpetuate racial stereotypes and 3) a **constructive change** in the ways that South China Morning Post reports news related to ethnic minorities.

Sincerely,

[your name]

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