

of MASTER

SUBJECT



file 256<sup>2</sup>

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 October, 1982

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HONG KONG PASSPORTS

The Prime Minister chaired a short meeting, attended by the Home Secretary and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, this afternoon to discuss the proposal that the term "British National" should be entered in British passports issued by the Governor of Hong Kong. Your letter of 5 October and Roger Bone's letter of 11 October were before the meeting.

The Prime Minister said that during her visit to Hong Kong it had been represented to her that the use of the term "British National" would do much to boost the confidence of the people of Hong Kong. Moreover, the Governor had pointed out that if this was not done, it might be difficult to secure the necessary amendments to Hong Kong legislation which followed from the British Nationality Act. It was clear that the use of this term would confer no right of abode in the United Kingdom. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary confirmed that Hong Kong belongers would of course enjoy our protection and consular assistance when travelling abroad.

The Home Secretary said that he did not wish to be unhelpful but he had to warn, on the basis of past history, that in every case when we had agreed to use wording which superficially appeared to confer a right of entry to this country, the description had in the event been used to obtain entry. In the case of Hong Kong, the consequences could be serious. We had to ask ourselves how many Hong Kong Chinese would seek to come here, if the situation in Hong Kong deteriorated. While the term "British Nationals" did not confer any legal right of abode, it had a connotation close to that of the term "British Citizens". Furthermore, we had to bear in mind that there were other dependent territories whose citizens might seek the same concession.

The Prime Minister said that while she appreciated these problems, refusal to make this gesture could have a very serious effect on confidence in Hong Kong, given the state of our discussions with the Chinese about the future of the territory. After further discussion, the Home Secretary said that he would be glad to look at the matter, in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, and see whether he could help. But we should safeguard our general position to the maximum extent possible - Hong Kong should not be a precedent for other dependent territories.

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The Prime Minister thought it would be helpful if the precise implications of the change could be spelt out in any further paper on the matter. She would like to see a specimen of the passport which a Hong Kong belonger would have in future. There was room for discussion as to precisely how the reference to "British National" should be worded. It might also be possible to bring forward to page 1 of the passport the endorsement that appeared on page 5, namely: "The holder is subject to control under the Immigration Act 1971".

D/K  
The Prime Minister would be grateful if this matter could now be looked at again and if she could receive further advice from the Home Secretary and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary as soon as possible on the way forward.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Roger Bone (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

A. J. COLES

Colin Walters, Esq.,  
Home Office