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TEL:

MOBILE:

**TO: Antiquities and Monuments Board,
Antiquities and Monuments Office,
136 Nathan Road,
Tsim Sha Tsui,
Kowloon**

10th July, 2012

Dear Sir,

RE: Preservation of the West Wing of the old Government Secretariat

In this last month of consultation, I would like to present for your consideration my view in support of the preservation of the West Wing of the old Government Secretariat.

My case for its preservation is presented below:

- a) I am one of the few persons who have had offices, over a period of 26 years, in all the three wings. I know the three wings intimately and, fortunately, am still alive to tell the tale. I started and ended my career as an Administrative Officer in the Main and East wings. Subsequently, as an elected member of the HK legislature, the last under British rule, I had my office in room 314 of the West Wing. Against this background, I consider all the three wings to be of equal value as historical monuments, deserving of preservation. One can say with good reason that the Central and East Wings are the 'OFFICIALS' Wings and the West Wing is the 'PEOPLE'S Wing'. All the three wings are, or should be, considered mutually complementary and inclusive for that particular period of Hong Kong's history when Hong Kong achieved its preeminence as one of the four Dragons in the world.
- b) It is a matter of historical record that, for the first time in the post war years, the then colonial Government of Hong Kong, through its West Wing, provided easy access to the general public who came to pay their rates and bills. It was where sundry licenses were issued, including hawkers' licenses, by the Urban Council which, we all know, is now no more, having been abolished in 1999. The West Wing also had the common touch and was part of the old Hong Kong. Ordinary members of the public came to the canteen for their lunches of chicken-wing noodles and pork-chop rice, long before instant noodles and fast foods became the rage.
- c) Many of us have memories of the past. But preservation of historical buildings is more than just past memories, collective or otherwise. It also goes beyond 'skin

and bone' as bricks and mortar are called. The preservation of buildings is all of those things.

- d) More importantly, and I need not tell you, preservation is about preserving a building with a visible and tangible record of the historical past. It is about people today being in touch with a time long gone - a time when people before us lived their way of life.
- e) From the enclosed space of their simple cubic forms, built with granite stones from Wong Tai Sin, to the simple entrance with lifts from Ice House Street, together the three wings reflect the inner aesthetics of the times past. Together, they form an oasis of uncluttered clarity and calm within the chaos of the polluted city today.
- f) In many ways, the past is more permanent than the future. Unless history is re-written, we are certain of the past; whereas the future is uncertain and unsure. Thus, arguments in favour of preserving the West Wing are as strong and valid as those for the Main and the East Wings. Together they tell a complete Hong Kong story. Together they identify the time-frame of what Hong Kong was like then.
- g) Preservation of a building needs to be matched at a practical level with its future use. The West Wing, a suitable place for all sorts of activities, could be used to provide services for the kids eg crèche in the city; or services for the elderly eg primary health-care centre for senior citizens and rest and reading areas in the city which they helped build. The West Wing would also be a suitable place to house new ministries proposed, but not yet approved, by the Chief Executive. And if we tear down the offensive wrought-iron fence, (erected post 1997) which is designed as a barrier to keep people away, the entire compound could provide a suitable sitting-out area for families in the weekends. The site could be a tourist spot, too, not only to show what Hong Kong was like back in the old days but also to prove that Hong Kong has a good eye for preservation of antiquities and monuments of value to Hong Kong, to China and to the world.

Cynics who read conspiracies between the lines also wonder whether, once the West Wing is gone, the demolition of the Central and East Wings might not be far behind - as trade-offs for profit in future and in the name of modernization.

To preserve only the East and Central Wings but to demolish the West Wing is like deliberately chopping one lung off in an act of mutilation. It is also like rewriting a part of Hong Kong's history, which in the famous words of GEORGE ORWELL, is the most 'effective way of destroying a people by denying their history or distorting the past'.

There are few precious buildings of the kind left. In this the final month of consultation, I am putting in my two cents' worth in pleading for the preservation of the West Wing, the demolition of which would be a grave error of judgment.

Yours sincerely,
R.P.