Frequently Asked Questions
on the launch of the Charter on External Lighting

Purpose of the Charter

Q1: Why launch the Charter on External Lighting (the Charter)?
A1: We encourage organisations and shops to sign up to the Charter with the following purposes:
   (i) **Minimise light nuisance:** Due to the high density of buildings in Hong Kong, external lighting at night can easily cause nuisance to residents in the vicinity. To switch off unnecessary external lighting during the preset time can provide residents with an environment conducive to sleep.
   (ii) **Minimise energy wastage:** To shorten the operating hours of external lighting can reduce energy consumption and save electricity.

Q2: Who are the targets of the Charter?
A2: We encourage owners of / and responsible persons for external lighting installations to sign up to the Charter. They include:
   (i) Property management companies
   (ii) Owners of advertising signs or advertising agencies responsible for the management of advertising signs
   (iii) Hotels, shopping malls, shops, restaurants and public bodies and organisations with external lighting installations or signboards

Q3: What are the measures to attract shops and organisations to sign up to the Charter?
A3: To recognise the support of participating shops and organisations, we will:
   (i) invite shops and organisations to attend the signing ceremony and award ceremony;
   (ii) publish the names of participating shops and organisations on newspapers and the relevant Government websites;
   (iii) award certificates to participating shops and organisations; and
   (iv) distribute labels to participating shops and organisations for display at their shops and websites.

Responsibilities of Signatories to the Charter

Q4: What external lighting installations are regarded as “lighting installations of decorative, promotional or advertising purposes that affect the outdoor environment, regardless of whether they are interior or exterior”?
A4: “Lighting installations of decorative, promotional or advertising purposes that affect the outdoor environment, regardless of whether they are interior or exterior”, include the following lighting installations on the facades of buildings and signs installed behind windows:

- Decorative lighting
- Shop signs
- Projected lighting
- Advertising signs (e.g. light box and signs illuminated by spotlights, regardless of whether the spotlights are above or below the sign or any other places near the signs.)
- Video walls
- Lighting for facades and building features
Q5: What is “preset time”?

A5: To tie in with the operation of different businesses, signatories to the Charter may choose to switch off lighting from either 11 p.m. or midnight to 7 a.m. on the following day. Platinum Award will be given to those which choose to switch off their external lighting installations from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., and Gold Award would go to those which switch off their external lighting installations from midnight to 7 a.m.

Q6: Is it necessary for Charter Signatories to switch off all external lighting at the preset time?

A6: It is not necessary to switch off external lighting installations during the preset time in the following circumstances:

- **Festive lightings** (which are not external lighting installations for promotional or advertising purposes): The decorative lighting for festive occasions, whether in static or non-static mode, is exempted from the switch-off requirement three weeks before the respective public holidays of Christmas (i.e., 25 December), New Year (i.e., 1 January) and Lunar New Year until the morning of the seventh day after the public holidays.

- **Shop-front signs of ground-floor shops that remain open during the preset time**: Although the signs must be operated in static mode (non-flickering signs) and located on the ground floor (not on the first floor or above of a building).

- **Lighting for safety, security and operational purposes**

Q7: What are the actual dates on which festive lightings are exempted from the switch-off requirement?

A7: In 2016-17, the exemption period for Christmas is followed by that of for New Year and Lunar New Year. Hence, the exemption period in 2016-17 will be from 11 p.m. on 4 December 2016 to 7 a.m. on 7 February 2017.
Q8: What are shop-front signs?
A8: Generally speaking, a shop-front sign is a sign erected at such locations as the entrance to a shop on the ground floor for displaying the shop name and logo. It may be a light box and signs illuminated by spotlights, etc.

Q9: Can signs at the top of buildings (e.g., advertising signboards and signs of hotels or hospitals) continue to be switched on during the preset time?
A9: Signs on top of the buildings that are covered by the Charter should be switched off during the preset time. Signs erected on higher floors of buildings would likely cause light nuisance to residents nearby. Also, as Hong Kong is relatively compact in size and buildings like hotels and hospitals are mostly located in prominent areas with signs on the ground floor, guests and patients should not have problems locating these buildings. Therefore, signs on top of buildings should be switched off at the preset time.
Q10: Can non-static signs be exempted?

A10: No. Since the light nuisance caused by non-static signs is generally more significant and irritating than that of static signs, any non-static lighting installations for decorative, promotional or advertising purposes (e.g. non-static signs, video walls, etc.) should be switched off after 11 p.m. If the non-static sign is a shop-front sign of a shop on the ground floor that remains open during the preset time, it should be turned to static mode after 11 p.m.

Q11: Why exemption during the public holidays of Christmas, New Year and Lunar New Year only is limited to festive lighting and does not cover lighting installations of promotional and advertising purposes?

A11: Taking into account the community’s viewing tradition of Christmas lights as well as the operational needs of the tourism and hotel sectors, etc., and the district celebration activities, the Charter allows flexibility for festive lighting during the public holidays of Christmas, New Year and Lunar New Year by exempting such lighting from the switch-off requirement at the preset time. Other external lighting installations (e.g. signs), however, have no direct relation to festive lighting. Participating organisations should switch off the external lighting installations for promotional or advertising purposes during the preset time to reduce light nuisance and energy wastage caused by external lighting installations.
Q12: If shops or catering establishments located on the first floor or above of a building remain open during the preset time, will their signs erected on the external walls be allowed to continue to operate?

A12: No. Signs erected on higher floors of a building stand a high chance of causing light nuisance to the nearby residents. Even if the shops concerned remain open, lighting should be switched off during the preset time. Upper-floor shops that remain open after the preset time may consider erecting signs on the ground floors of their buildings in a lawful manner without blocking the access roads to indicate that they are still operating.

Q13: What are ground-floor shops and upper-floor shops?

A13: Upper-floor shops include those shops located on the first floor or above of a building. As signs erected on the higher floors of a building stand a high chance of causing light nuisance to the nearby residents, even if the shops concerned (regardless of whether these shops are located on the ground floor or the first floor or above of a building) remain open, their upper-floor signs (i.e. signs installed on the first floor or above of a building) should be switched off during the preset time.

Q14: If an external lighting installation, such as a sign or an advertising signboard, is erected on the commercial building where there are no residential dwellings nearby, will the sign concerned be exempted from the switch-off requirement during the preset time?

A14: The Charter applies to all districts in Hong Kong. External lighting installations erected on commercial buildings or residential buildings should be switched off during the preset time.

Q15: If spotlights are installed for illumination of a sign while they do not form part of the sign, should such lighting installations fall within the scope of the Charter and be switched off during the preset time?

A15: Lighting installations of a sign (regardless of whether the spotlights are erected on the top or bottom of the sign or any associated positions near the sign) fall within the scope of the Charter and should be switched off during the preset time even if they do not form part of the sign.

Q16: Does the Charter allow shops with multiple signboards to switch off some but not all of the lighting installations?

A16: We encourage owners of shops with multiple external lighting installations to switch off the lighting of decorative, promotional or advertising purposes that affect the outdoor environment during the preset time. The shops can still be regarded as participants in the Charter so long as the owners only switch on those lighting installations for safety or operational needs during the preset time.
Q17: Would it be necessary for a chain store group to require all of their shops to adopt the same switch-off time in order for the group to comply with the switch-off requirement in the Charter?

A17: The Charter encourages all enterprises and organisations to switch off their lighting of decorative, promotional or advertising purposes during the preset time. We welcome individual shops of each chain store group or individual restaurants of each catering group to pledge to switch off external lighting at 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. or midnight to 7 a.m. according to their operational needs.

Q18: Does the Charter allow flexibility for the participants to adjust external lighting, such as dimming down the external lighting installations?

A18: Due to the high building density and close proximity of commercial and residential premises, the multiple and cumulative light sources might cause light nuisance to the residents even if the lighting installations have been dimmed down. Moreover, it would be difficult to assess whether the luminance level of each lighting installation is appropriate or would be accepted by the residents in the vicinity. Therefore, it is more practicable to require signatories of the Charter to switch off the external lighting during the preset time.

Q19: Can convenience stores sign up to the Charter while keeping their shop-front signs on overnight?

A19: Yes. The Charter allows shops that remain open during the preset time to switch on the shop-front signs in non-static mode. However, if the sign is located on the first floor or above of the building, it should be switched off even if the shop on the ground floor is still in operation after the preset time to avoid causing any nuisance to the residents nearby. Also, we encourage Charter participants operating overnight to consider adopting positive measures by switching off part of the lighting installations (e.g. fluorescent lights and light bulbs) so that lights can focus on the name or logo of the shop in order to minimise nuisance to residents nearby and energy wastage.

Q20: If the external lighting installations are erected for multiple purposes (e.g. decorative lighting in theme parks that is turned on for the safety of their staff and customers and security), can the owners of such lighting installations sign up to the Charter while keeping some of the external lighting installations on overnight?

A20: As regards external lighting installations erected for multiple purposes, exemptions will be granted to such lighting so long as the participating organisations of the Charter pledge to switch off unnecessary external lighting during the preset time and confirm that the external lighting installations which remain in operation have to be turned on for safety and security purposes or due to operational needs. However, if the Government receives any complaints about the nuisance caused by these installations and the complaints are found to be justified following site inspection by the Government, the participating organisations concerned will be asked to switch off the lighting under complaint during the preset time. If they refuse to switch off the relevant lighting during the preset time, they will be removed from the list of participants in the Charter scheme.

Q21: Will the Charter take into consideration different circumstances of individual districts and exempt a particular district from the switch-off requirement?

A21: Given the high density of buildings and the close proximity of commercial and residential premises in Hong Kong, there have been complaints about external lighting in every district every year. Therefore, the Charter is applicable to all districts in Hong Kong.

Monitoring the effectiveness

Q22: How can we know if the participating organisations comply with the Charter? What follow-up actions will be taken against the participating organisations which do not comply with the Charter?

A22: Although the Charter is a voluntary scheme, we believe the participating organisations will fulfill their pledge seriously. We will also set up a website for announcing the list of participating organisations in the Charter, and publish the names of the Charter signatories in newspapers and relevant Government websites to raise public awareness of the Charter. If the Government receives any complaints about the nuisance caused by the external lighting installations of the organisations participating in the Charter, and the complaints are found to be justified following site inspection by the Government, the owners or the responsible person will be asked to switch off the lighting under complaint during the preset time. If they refuse, the organisations concerned will be removed from the list of participating organisations in the Charter.