

Operators of unlicensed guesthouses fined

Two women were each fined \$5,000 at the Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts today (November 4) for contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance.

The courts heard that in January and February this year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) from the Home Affairs Department, when searching the Internet for intelligence about unlicensed guesthouse activities, identified two suspected unlicensed guesthouses on Lohas Park Road in Tseung Kwan O. The OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented rooms in the guesthouses on a daily basis through an Internet platform.

According to the OLA's records, these guesthouses did not possess licences under the Ordinance on the days of lodging. The women responsible for operating the premises were charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and can lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment. Guesthouse licensees may advertise or hold out to provide sleeping accommodation on the Internet. To assist the public and the tourists to identify licensed guesthouses, the licensees should indicate clearly "Licensed guesthouse" in all promotional advertisement materials or advertisements related to the guesthouse.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA by the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaenq@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website (www.hadla.gov.hk), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".