

first person

Teacher David Wong Kai-yan, 39, started an online petition for tougher penalties against animal abuse after two kittens – Sylvia and Chop Chop – were sadistically attacked in Mongkok. When the petition closed on Monday, more than 40,000 people had signed it.

“ The first kitten is the one we now call Sylvia. She was found in September by an old lady who feeds cats around Mongkok every day. The kitten was lying on the ground in the street with her legs broken. She was alive but in terrible pain.

The old lady took the cat to a friend who was an animal lover and a few days later Sylvia was put in the care of a group called Hong Kong Alley Cat Watch, which took her to a nearby vet.

Within a week a second cat had been injured in the same way. Chop Chop had the same kind of injuries and the vet said it may have been done by the same person. The vet said the kitten's legs had been broken by someone using their bare hands.

This time the injuries were even more serious. Four legs were broken. The injuries are only to the legs, but they were so bad that the broken bone pierced the skin and was sticking out. One of Chop Chop's legs had to be amputated.

I was enraged at what happened. I decided to set up the website because it was the only thing I could do with my time and my resources. I didn't expect it to be so big but people sent hundreds of e-mails to me expressing concern and asking if something could be done. When we closed the petition on Monday night, it had more than 40,000 signatures.

I am going to carry this campaign on until we see some positive change. We want to target this campaign at the highest level of the government. We want to see a tougher law against this kind of animal abuse. Currently, the maximum penalty is six months' jail and a \$2,000 fine, which is far below international levels. Hong



“When people tolerate things like this being done to animals, the next thing is that they tolerate them being done to people”

Kong calls itself a world city. If that is the case, we would like to see Hong Kong catch up with the standards of the rest of the world on animal welfare.

We also want the police to enforce the law, otherwise it is meaningless. We are disappointed with the reaction of the police and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The police took a statement from the lady who found the cats. Afterwards they sent more police to patrol the area and they put up a notice near where the crime happened – and that is all. There are witnesses and there are

potential suspects but the police don't seem to be doing anything.

The SPCA told me they can't do anything now it has been reported to the police. It is true the SPCA doesn't have any authority to investigate or prosecute, but the attitude they showed to me and our volunteers has been cold. They don't seem to care.

People are angry about what has happened to Sylvia and Chop Chop. They want something to be done. There are obviously a lot of long-running frustrations over animal welfare in Hong Kong which have accumulated and have now come to the surface because of this.

This is a case that has caused concern among a lot of people, not only animal lovers. It is not just about animals – it is about respect for life.

We are seeing a worrying trend. I teach youngsters aged 18 and 19 and when I told them about these cases, some of them gave no response at all – no anger, nothing. They were just blank.

This is a sad reflection on our society. A criminologist told me that when people tolerate things like this being done to animals, the next thing is that they tolerate them being done to people.

It is a big challenge to reverse these attitudes. All we can do is let people know and let people think and let people argue.

There are 40,000 people out there who are expressing their anger and their feelings – but there are thousands and thousands of people out there who are without feelings and who remain silent.

The two kittens are recovering well. I am hopeful they will find a home with someone who has the passion for animals and the love to take care of them for life, but at the moment they are not ready to be taken in by anyone. They are still recovering and it will take some time.

As told to Simon Parry

■ The website is www.animalearth.org/petition/signup/vv.php