

Address by CE to LegCo on passage of Safeguarding National Security Bill

Following is the English translation of the address by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at the Legislative Council meeting on the Legislative Council's passage of the Safeguarding National Security Bill today (March 19):

Mr President and Honourable Members of the Legislative Council (LegCo),

Today marks a historic moment for Hong Kong. It is a historic moment that Hong Kong has been waiting for 26 years, 8 months and 19 days. It is a historic moment where the Sixth-term Government and the Seventh LegCo of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) have finally accomplished a glorious mission together. It is a proud moment for all of the HKSAR in collectively making glorious history.

Today, the constitutional responsibility and historic mission of legislating for Article 23 of the Basic Law have finally been fulfilled. The Safeguarding National Security Bill has been passed after the third reading, ensuring the effective protection of national security.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of President Xi Jinping's proposal of the holistic view of national security. On this very day, we have fulfilled our constitutional responsibility of enacting local legislation under Article 23 of the Basic Law. We have accomplished this historic mission, living up to the trust placed in us by the Central Government and the country. I will sign the Bill and promulgate the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance by publication in the Gazette on the 23rd. In other words, the Ordinance will officially take effect on March 23, 2024.

The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance enables Hong Kong to effectively prevent, suppress and punish espionage activities, conspiracies and traps from foreign intelligence agencies, and infiltration and sabotage by hostile forces. We can effectively prevent "black-clad violence" and "colour revolution". We can effectively prevent "Hong Kong independence" and violent destruction. We no longer need to worry about saboteurs' "mutual destruction" threats in Hong Kong and their acts of damaging public facilities, throwing petrol bombs, setting fires, assaulting citizens with differing opinions, pushing Hong Kong into an abyss, and destroying years of our city's development. From now on, the people of Hong Kong will no longer experience these harms and sorrows.

The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance aligns with three principles, as stipulated in its provisions. These three principles are:

- (1) the highest principle of the policy of "one country, two systems" is to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests;
- (2) human rights are to be respected and protected, and the rights and

freedoms, including the freedoms of speech, of the press and of publication, the freedoms of association, of assembly, of procession and of demonstration, enjoyed under the Basic Law and the provisions of two international covenants as applied to the HKSAR, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, are to be protected in accordance with the law; and (3) for acts and activities endangering national security, there must be adherence to active prevention in accordance with the principle of the rule of law, and suppression and punishment in accordance with the law.

The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance demonstrates three key objectives:

- (1) to resolutely, fully and faithfully implement the policy of "one country, two systems" under which the people of Hong Kong administer Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy;
- (2) to establish and improve the legal system and enforcement mechanisms for the HKSAR to safeguard national security; and
- (3) to prevent, suppress and punish acts and activities endangering national security in accordance with the law, to protect the lawful rights and interests of the residents of the HKSAR and other people in the HKSAR, to ensure the property and investment in the HKSAR are protected by the law, to maintain prosperity and stability of the HKSAR.

The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance has four characteristics:

- (1) the Ordinance achieves convergence, compatibility and complementarity with the Hong Kong National Security Law and other Hong Kong laws concerning national security;
- (2) the Ordinance made reference to the experience of other common law jurisdictions, but is implemented in the light of the actual situation in Hong Kong;
- (3) the provisions of the Ordinance were written in line with common law conventions, and are detailed, clear and easy to understand; and
- (4) the Ordinance improved laws which were obsolete and inadequate.

I unveiled and embarked on the mission of legislating for Article 23 of the Basic Law at the Chief Executive's Interactive Exchange Question and Answer Session in the Legislative Council (LegCo) on January 25. My consultation with the LegCo was immediately followed by the public consultation from January 30 to February 28.

The Government has received over 13 000 submissions of opinions, of which 98.6 per cent showed support and gave positive comments, indicating that the legislation has a strong popular support.

I would like to express my gratitude to the President and all Honourable Members of the LegCo. From convening a Council meeting for the first and second readings of the Safeguarding National Security Bill, and the unremitting scrutiny by the Bills Committee and the unwavering support of the House Committee, to convening a full Council meeting today for the resumption

of the second reading debate, third reading and passage, their focus has always been on the genuine and urgent need of the legislation. They have upheld the goal of completing the legislative work as soon as possible, and fulfilled the HKSAR's constitutional duty that has been long awaited in the past 26 years, 8 months and 19 days.

Here, I would like to extend my gratitude firstly to President Andrew Leung for leading the LegCo to express support for the necessity and urgency of enacting the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, for convening special meetings to expedite the completion of the legislative work as soon as possible to safeguard national security, as well as for ensuring the scrutiny proceeded in an orderly manner according to established procedures. President Leung has disclosed that every morning when checking his mobile phone, he would receive text messages from a number of Members, all about Article 23. He cared for Article 23, day and night, and he felt that all Members attached as much importance in the legislative work for Article 23 as he did. The unity and sharing the same goal with all Members had given him a boost in taking things forward.

I also sincerely thank all members of the Bills Committee, including Chairman Martin Liao, Deputy Chairman Chan Hak-kan, and the 13 Committee members. They engaged in intensive scrutiny of the Bill, nearly ceaselessly from 9am to 7pm on seven consecutive days. They often expended a significant amount of time deliberating individual clauses. On one occasion, more than an hour and 20 minutes was spent in the examination of a single clause, while instances where more than 30 minutes was spent on a single clause were aplenty. The Bills Committee, together with the subcommittee earlier set up by the House Committee to study matters relating to Basic Law Article 23 legislation, convened 25 meetings in total, and devoted nearly 50 hours to scrutinise every clause of the Bill in detail, raising over 1 000 questions and comments and resulting in 91 amendments. Every member has been conscientious and completed the scrutiny process with high quality and high efficiency. I know that in order to ensure the effective scrutiny of the Bill, Chairman Liao did a lot of preparatory work in advance, especially in preparing for possible situations where the Chairman had to make rulings. But in the end, that became unnecessary. As every Committee member did their preparatory work thoroughly, the process of scrutiny was very smooth and there was no need for him to make any ruling. He told others that he felt encouraged by Members' unity and determination in accomplishing this historic mission.

I also take the opportunity to thank the Chairman Starry Lee and all members of the House Committee for agreeing to the Government's proposal to expedite the introduction of the Bill to the Council for consideration. With her other capacity as a Member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Chairman Lee had to travel twice in two days between Hong Kong and Beijing during the "two sessions". She had indicated that the experience was unforgettable but worthwhile.

The entire legislative process at the LegCo was conducted in accordance with procedures throughout, and lawmakers scrutinised the Bill diligently and

meticulously. Speeches by members covered diverse perspectives and a wide range of topics. Some focused on details, others on principles, and some discussed ideologies. The content was comprehensive and in-depth. The scrutiny process, proceeded under the goal of completing the legislative work as soon as possible, was of high quality and high efficiency. Today, we have passed the Safeguarding National Security Bill. It demonstrates the greatest value of "patriots administering Hong Kong", enabling the HKSAR to gloriously accomplish the sacred mission of legislating for Article 23 of the Basic Law.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to the Government for staying united in contributing to the Basic Law Article 23 legislation. In particular, I want to pay tribute to my colleagues in the Security Bureau and the Department of Justice. I thank the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam; the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung; and relevant colleagues in the Security Bureau and the Department of Justice, who have worked tirelessly from conducting consultation, drafting legislative proposals, and explaining and rebutting criticisms, to assisting the LegCo in scrutinsing the Bill. I recall a number of occasions when I made phone calls to the offices of the Security Bureau and the Department of Justice. I only realised, after hanging up the phone and checking the clock on my desk, that it was already two or three in the morning. I am proud and grateful for their dedication, enthusiasm, and professional competence. They are heroes in my heart and guardians of the HKSAR.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who loves the country and Hong Kong for supporting and advocating for the Basic Law Article 23 legislation. With our concerted efforts, we have put an end to a predicament that has plagued Hong Kong for 26 years, 8 months and 19 days, and made glorious history for the HKSAR. With the passage of the Safeguarding National Security Bill, we will be able to effectively safeguard national security, allowing Hong Kong to move forward without worries or burden, and focus on developing the economy and improving people's livelihoods. Together, we will make Hong Kong a more prosperous and better home for everyone.

History bears witness to this important moment, witnessing our joy, inspiration and pride, and witnessing our collective contribution to the glorious history of the HKSAR. Thank you, Mr President. Thank you, Honourable Members.