

LCQ6: Complaints about teachers' professional conduct

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Helena Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

From June to November last year, the Education Bureau (EDB) received more than 100 complaints about teachers' professional conduct. Such complaints involved allegations against the teachers concerned for having disseminated hate remarks on social media, committed provocative acts, used inappropriate teaching materials, allegedly broken the law, etc. The follow-up actions taken by the EDB for those cases included issuing advisory letters, warning letters and reprimand letters, taking the disciplinary action of interdiction, and reviewing the teachers' registration status. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed if the EDB's pursuit of liability of individual teachers for making remarks on social media has infringed the freedom of speech and freedom of expression that the teachers enjoy under Article 27 of the Basic Law and Article 16 of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the legal basis for the EDB's interference with the teachers' making remarks during non-office hours and outside school;

(2) of the EDB's justifications for requesting schools to review whether the teaching staff members who have been arrested but have not yet been prosecuted are still suitable for taking up teaching posts or other duties in their schools; whether the EDB has assessed if such move has deprived the teachers concerned of their rights to be treated fairly in the disciplinary mechanism (including the opportunities to make representations and lodge appeals), thus giving rise to the effect of "punishment before conviction", which violates the common law principle of presumption of innocence; and

(3) how the EDB defines "hate remarks", "provocative acts" and "inappropriate teaching materials", and whether the EDB will make public those teaching materials which are judged to be inappropriate so that members of the public may make their own judgement as to whether the follow-up actions concerned amount to political suppression; if the EDB will not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Teachers play a vital role in passing on knowledge and nurturing students' character and their every word and deed have a far-reaching impact

on students' growth. Parents and the community at large thus have great expectations of our teachers regarding their solid professional knowledge and high standards of morality. It is therefore of the utmost importance that their words and deeds must adhere to the standards of professional conduct and morality generally accepted by the community. As set out in the Code for the Education Profession of Hong Kong, a professional educator should show respect for the law and the behavioural norms acceptable to society, do his/her best to maintain a healthy social environment and should not discriminate against any student on the basis of political belief, family background, etc.

The Education Bureau (EDB) strictly maintains a teaching profession of high quality and with professional conduct to ensure the quality of education in Hong Kong and safeguard students' well-being. The Education Ordinance empowers the Permanent Secretary to cancel the teacher registration of a person in specific circumstances, including the person is not a fit and proper person to be a teacher, or it appears to the Permanent Secretary that the teacher is incompetent. The EDB has all along seriously followed up suspected cases of professional misconduct in accordance with established procedures and in a professional manner.

Schools also play an important role in promoting teachers' professional conduct. Schools, as organisations providing formal education and as employers of teachers, have to be responsible for the quality of education, and monitor their teachers and remind them of the behaviours and role expected of them from time to time. Schools should also take the initiative to follow up substantiated cases of misconduct involving their staff, and take appropriate disciplinary actions against them pursuant to the Employment Ordinance, the Code of Aid, and the terms of their employment contracts. All along, the school management in general has dealt with complaints of suspected professional misconduct professionally based on evidence.

Regarding the Dr Hon Helena Wong's question, our reply is as follows:

(1) Since June 2019, the EDB has received and handled many complaints about teachers' professional misconduct, most of which involve inappropriate messages posted on social media, such as hate, malicious or abusive messages and messages that promote violence. These messages, regardless of their form of delivery and the deeds or values reflected therein, failed to meet the professional conduct of teachers and social expectations, let alone serving as role models for their students. The Code for the Education Profession of Hong Kong and the Education Ordinance are not only applicable within schools. The moral values displayed by teachers in private forum is also part of their professional conduct. I must stress that this is neither limiting teachers' right to express their views on social issues and political beliefs nor infringing upon/reducing the freedom of speech enjoyed by teachers. Furthermore, the exercise of the freedom of speech, whether in Western countries or Hong Kong, is not without restrictions. It should be exercised in a rational and lawful manner. The rights or reputations of others should be respected, and national security and public order should also be protected. It is absolutely not acceptable to the community when teachers' words and deeds show that their standards of morality and values fail to meet

public expectation. The EDB has the obligation to take appropriate actions based on the facts and seriousness of individual cases. The actions to be taken include issuing advisory, warning, reprimand letters, as well as cancellation of the registration of them, to uphold teachers' professional conduct.

(2) The Code of Aid clearly stipulates that subject to the provisions of the Employment Ordinance, a school may suspend a teacher from his/her normal duties if he/she has been involved or is likely to be involved in criminal proceedings of a serious nature or in serious misconduct.

The EDB also explained related issues to schools in detail on December 20, 2019. Schools, when considering whether teachers should be suspended from duties, should take into account students' well-being, including the impact on their personal safety, moral development and quality of learning, as a primary consideration. If a teacher is suspected of having committed a serious crime, the school should assess the risk involved should the teacher continue to contact with the students even if the case or the incident is not yet concluded. Specifically, if a teacher is involved in a serious offence related to personal safety (such as arson, serious wounding, riot, possession of dangerous goods/prohibited weapons, etc.), or an offence generally considered by the public to be seriously violating moral standards (such as a sexual offence, trafficking or possession of drugs, possession of child pornography, etc.), taking into account students' personal safety and well-being, schools should handle the case prudently, and suspend the duties of the teacher concerned. As for teachers under arrest but not charged with any offences, schools should examine carefully the nature and seriousness of the cases involved and consider whether it is appropriate to allow them to continue to take up their teaching or other duties in schools. Likewise, for cases of professional misconduct, if schools find that the cases are of a serious nature after investigation, they should assess whether it is still proper for the teachers to perform teaching duties. It is believed that parents and the public will worry and find it unacceptable if teachers involving in serious misconduct may continue to take up teaching duties or to have contact with students.

(3) Our society has its moral bottom lines and consensus on how "hate remarks" and "provocative acts" are defined and they are recognised and observed across different sectors such as the education, media and legal professions, and by the community at large as well. There are, however, some educational principles on the development and selection of teaching materials: teaching materials must meet the curriculum aims and objectives set by the Curriculum Development Council; teachers should consider whether the content of teaching materials is accurate and appropriate to the cognitive development of students at different learning stages, and should adopt objective and impartial information in accordance with the recommendations set forth in the relevant curriculum and assessment guides, so that students can construct knowledge and skills as well as develop positive values and attitudes, thereby becoming informed and responsible citizens. The content of teaching materials should be free of bias, sweeping generalisation of a certain political stance, malicious remarks or offensive

language, and incitement to negativity or troublemaking on some flimsy pretext. In the classroom, teachers should also adopt appropriate learning and teaching strategies that match the lesson objectives. "Inappropriate teaching materials" refer to those selected or developed school-based teaching materials that do not align with the above principles. For instance, teaching materials that contain messages deviating from the standards of morality or irrational discussions, or cite the use of violence as a means of resolving disputes are considered inappropriate because they fail to guide students to analyse problems rationally and resolve them in a peaceful and lawful manner. For example, when discussing how young people can face difficulties and challenges as they grow up, if the teaching materials suggest a passive approach to solving problems, they will fail to appropriately guide students to develop a positive outlook on life, and fail to meet the aims and objectives of education. School should improve on that.

School-based teaching materials should be developed professionally in accordance with the learning goals and objectives of the curriculum without overstepping moral bottom lines for which a consensus has been long-established in our society. The appropriateness of teaching materials is a matter of education professionalism. The EDB believes that teachers in general can uphold professionalism in developing and selecting suitable school-based teaching materials. The school management also understands and monitors the content and quality of school teaching materials, and together with teachers guides students to examine issues from multiple perspectives and show respect for different opinions.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the EDB will continue to play a gate-keeping role in promoting and upholding teacher's professional conduct for protecting the well-being of our students effectively.

Thank you, President.

Lunar New Year auction of vehicle registration marks to be held on February 8

The Transport Department today (January 8) announced that the Lunar New Year auction of vehicle registration marks will be held on February 8 (Saturday) at Meeting Room S221, L2, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Wan Chai.

"A total of 45 vehicle registration marks will be put up for public auction. Forty-four of them are traditional vehicle registration marks (TVRMs) and one of them is a personalised vehicle registration mark (PVRM). The list of marks has been uploaded to the department's website,

www.td.gov.hk," a department spokesman said.

People who wish to participate in the bidding at the auction should take note of the following points:

(a) Successful bidders are required to produce the following documents for completion of registration and payment procedures immediately after the successful bidding:

(i) the identity document of the successful bidder;

(ii) the identity document of the purchaser if it is different from the successful bidder;

(iii) a copy of the certificate of incorporation if the purchaser is a body corporate; and

(iv) a crossed cheque made payable to "The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" or "The Government of the HKSAR". Any bidder who wishes to bid for both TVRMs and the PVRM should bring at least two crossed cheques for payment of auction prices. (For an auctioned mark paid for by cheque, the first three working days after the date of auction will be required for cheque clearance confirmation before processing of the application for mark assignment can be completed.) Successful bidders may also pay through the Easy Pay System (EPS), but are reminded to note the maximum transfer amount in the same day of the payment card. Payment by post-dated cheque, cash, credit card or other methods will not be accepted.

(b) Purchasers must make payment of the purchase price through EPS or by crossed cheque and complete the Memorandum of Sale of Registration Mark or the Memorandum of Sale of Personalised Vehicle Registration Mark immediately after the bidding. Subsequent alteration of the particulars in the Memorandum will not be permitted.

(c) A registration mark can only be assigned to a motor vehicle which is registered in the name of the purchaser. The Certificate of Incorporation must be produced immediately by the purchaser if a vehicle registration mark purchased is to be registered under the name of a body corporate.

(d) The display of a vehicle registration mark on a motor vehicle should be in compliance with the requirements stipulated in Schedule 4 to the Road Traffic (Registration and Licensing of Vehicles) Regulations.

(e) There is no two-row display format for the PVRM in this auction. The mark can only be displayed in one row.

(f) Special vehicle registration marks are non-transferable. Where the ownership of a motor vehicle with a special vehicle registration mark is transferred, the allocation of the special vehicle registration mark shall be cancelled.

(g) The purchaser shall, within 12 months after the date of auction, apply to the Commissioner for Transport for the vehicle registration mark to be assigned to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the purchaser. If the purchaser fails to assign the registration mark within 12 months, allocation

of the registration mark will be cancelled and arranged for re-allocation in accordance with the statutory provision without prior notice to the purchaser.

For other auction details, please refer to the "Guidance Notes – Auction of Vehicle Registration Marks" and "Guidance Notes – Auction of PVRMs", which can be downloaded from the department's website, www.td.gov.hk.

LCQ5: Access to communications information by law enforcement agencies

Following is a question by the Hon Charles Peter Mok and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

Article 30 of the Basic Law protects the enjoyment of freedom and privacy of communication by Hong Kong residents. Article 14 in Part II (The Hong Kong Bill of Rights) of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance provides that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his correspondence. The existing Interception of Communications and Surveillance Ordinance merely requires law enforcement agencies to seek authorisation from a panel judge before conducting postal interceptions and telecommunications interceptions, but it does not impose any regulation on the information (including communications content, metadata and personal data) in network communications (such as mobile phones and web servers). Moreover, a judgment handed down by the High Court on October 27, 2017 has pointed out that the Police must, unless in exigent circumstances, obtain a warrant from the Court before they may inspect the mobile phone of an arrestee. It has been reported that an arrestee recently indicated that some of the instant messaging records in his locked mobile phone had been admitted as part of the evidence by the prosecution, but he had never disclosed to the Police the password for unlocking his mobile phone since his arrest and he had not been informed before the court hearing of the Police having obtained a relevant warrant. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of cases since June last year in which the Police seized and unlocked the mobile phones of arrestees and accessed the information therein and, among such cases, the number of those in which a warrant was obtained;
- (2) since when the Police began to use hacking software or other cracking

tool for unlocking mobile phones in order to access the instant messaging contents or other information therein; and

(3) whether the Government will (i) by drawing reference from the relevant legislation in Korea, Taiwan, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, introduce legislative amendments or enact legislation to regulate the work on the collection of electronic evidence by law enforcement agencies, and (ii) take the initiative to regularly publish details of the requests made by various law enforcement agencies to information and communication technology companies for disclosure of information, so as to enhance the transparency of law enforcement efforts and enable such transparency to reach international standards?

Reply:

President,

Under the laws of Hong Kong, law enforcement agencies (LEAs) have the responsibility to prevent and detect crimes, so as to protect citizens' lives and properties. In the course of carrying out their responsibilities, LEAs may exercise the search and seizure powers conferred by relevant legislation, and seize and examine various objects of the suspected offence, including mobile phones and other similar devices.

According to the judgment on a case handed down by the High Court on October 27, 2017, Police officers may seize mobile phones found on an apprehended person or in or about the place at which they have been apprehended in accordance with section 50(6) of the Police Force Ordinance (Cap 232) (PFO), but may examine the content of these mobile phones without obtaining a warrant only in exigent circumstances. The judgment also points out that, in authorising a warrantless search of the digital content of mobile phones or other similar devices seized on arrest only in exigent circumstances, section 50(6) of PFO is constitutional and compliant with Article 14 of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance (Cap 383) and Article 30 of the Basic Law. I understand that LEAs have all along adhered strictly to the principles as laid down in the judgment.

When conducting criminal investigations, if required, LEAs may apply to the Court in accordance with the relevant laws for a search warrant authorising the search of any premises and the seizure of objects, documents, and materials found in the premises. LEAs have to observe stringent requirements when applying for search warrants, swear an oath before the magistrate to confirm that there are reasons to suspect that items of value to an investigation are being kept in a search target, and set out clearly the justifications for as well as the scope of the search warrant being sought. LEAs also have to satisfactorily answer any questions raised by the magistrates, who may impose conditions when issuing a search warrant having regard to individual circumstances. If the magistrates do not consider the justification to be sufficient or applicable, they will refuse the issue of the search warrant.

Magistrates deal with applications for search warrants strictly in accordance with the law, having regard to the facts and particulars presented before them by LEA officers. We need to respect the authority, professionalism, independence, and credibility of the Court.

I must stress that applying to the Court for search warrants and applying for prescribed authorisations for covert operations under the Interception of Communications and Surveillance Ordinance (Cap 589) (ICSO) are two separate legal procedures for different purposes, and should not be mixed up. Search warrants are applied in accordance with the relevant legislation and have to be approved by the Court, the purpose of which are for collecting evidence as documentary exhibits in Court. The information which operations under ICSO seek to collect is mainly used for intelligence. Both are stringent sets of procedures, and are strictly regulated and restricted by law.

As to the case mentioned by Hon Mok in the question, Police have already publicly clarified that it was conducted under magistrate-issued search warrant. Since the case has already entered legal proceedings, it is not appropriate for me to comment further on the case details.

My reply to various parts of the question raised by Hon Charles Mok is as follows:

(1) From June to November 2019, Police processed 1 429 cases that involved mobile phones as evidence. Among those cases, 3 721 mobile phones belonging to arrested persons or suspects were involved, and relevant cases were all processed with search warrants issued by the Court.

(2) Generally, Police would only conduct digital forensic examination on mobile phones after obtaining Court warrants. The examination and the evidence obtained would be adduced in the relevant open trials. As the critical technologies used for the examinations are confidential information, disclosing such information may reveal to criminals details of LEAs' operations, thus allowing criminals to take advantage by undermining LEAs' capabilities in combating serious crimes and maintaining public safety. As such, I cannot disclose the information.

I must stress that, regardless of the technology employed, and irrespective of whether the relevant operation was conducted under a search warrant issued by the Court or was conducted under ICSO, Police operations must be conducted legally strictly adhering to the relevant laws and regulations.

(3) The existing ICSO requires the disclosure of a host of prescribed information. The Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance (the Commissioner) is required by ICSO to provide an annual report setting out the information specified for disclosure. The reports are made public. They are tabled at the Legislative Council every year, and are discussed at the Panel on Security. The reports cover figures and types of operations, the results of the Commissioner's inspections, and whether there

were cases of non-compliance and the relevant disciplinary actions, etc. This practice is similar to that in many overseas jurisdictions.

Requests for information relating to the detection of crime from network services providers are adequately regulated by laws, as LEAs must do so in compliance with the requirements of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap 486) or under a search warrant. The Government considers the existing regime and practice suitable for the situation in Hong Kong and should continue to operate.

Thank you, President.

LCQ3: Explanatory work by HKSAR Government in US

Following is a question by the Hon Chung Kwok-pan (Hon Shiu Ka-fai to ask on his behalf) and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

According to the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act (the Act) enacted earlier by the authorities of the United States (US), the US Secretary of State shall submit annually to the Congress a certification in conjunction with the report required under the US-Hong Kong Policy Act, enunciating whether Hong Kong continues to warrant existing treatment under US laws, including being treated as a separate customs territory. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details of the lobbying, conducted by the Government's Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs) in three US cities, against the enactment of the Act, including the ways in which and the number of occasions on which such lobbying was conducted, the politicians met, as well as the relevant reasons and data presented to them (set out by date in a table);

(2) as the Government has reproached a few Hong Kong people for visiting the US in September last year to urge the Congress to pass the Act and making at a hearing misrepresentations of the violent demonstrations in Hong Kong, whether, in view of such a situation, the ETO in Washington DC stepped up efforts at that time to lobby US politicians and explained to them the real situation of Hong Kong; if so, of the details, and whether it has studied the reasons why the Act was still enacted eventually by the US authorities; if it did not step up lobbying efforts, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the Government's specific plans in place to lobby US politicians this year, so as to avoid the US authorities ceasing to treat Hong Kong as a separate customs territory?

Reply:

President,

Under "one country, two systems", the Basic Law confers on Hong Kong a unique status. Article 116 of the Basic Law stipulates that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is a separate customs territory and Article 151 provides that Hong Kong may, using the name "Hong Kong, China", participate in such international organisations as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation as a separate member.

Therefore, Hong Kong's unique status is not granted unilaterally by any other country, but is conferred by the Basic Law. Hong Kong's unique status is well recognised and respected by the international community. Our economic and trade status is on par with other WTO members, and we are making use of this capacity in the international economic and trade arena and we establish mutually beneficial relations with our trading partners around the world.

The United States (US) enacted in 1992 the US-Hong Kong Policy Act (the Policy Act) which sets out its policy and principled positions towards Hong Kong. The act is a policy legislation of the US itself but not an international or bilateral agreement. Over the years, the US has been conducting economic and trade exchanges with Hong Kong in accordance with the Policy Act, has been respecting Hong Kong as a separate customs territory, and has on this basis established mutually beneficial bilateral economic and trade relations with Hong Kong. The US is Hong Kong's second largest merchandise trading partner in the world, while Hong Kong is the US' tenth largest export market. According to the US' statistics, the US has been enjoying the largest trade surplus with Hong Kong among its global trading partners for many years, valued at US\$33.8 billion in 2018 alone. In 2018, the US was the seventh major source of inward direct investment into Hong Kong and the ninth major destination of outward direct investment from Hong Kong. Moreover, there are 1 344 US companies in Hong Kong, of which 278 are regional headquarters. Around 85 000 US citizens also live in Hong Kong. The close and reciprocal bilateral relation between the two places is obvious.

Therefore, the enactment of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act (the Hong Kong Act) by the US is unnecessary and unwarranted. The uncertainty caused by the Hong Kong Act will inevitably affect the confidence of international investors and companies in Hong Kong and will certainly damage the mutually beneficial relationship, including the US' interests.

My consolidated reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

As for explanatory work, the HKSAR Government has been explaining to countries around the world the successful implementation of "one country, two

systems" since our return to the Motherland, and promoting Hong Kong's unique status under the Basic Law and "one country, two systems" as well as our own various advantages. Such work is done through exchanges of information, reciprocal official visits, participation in international conferences, and the regular liaison of the overseas Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs). The Financial Secretary visited the US in October 2019, while the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development visited the US three times in September 2018, June and September 2019 respectively, during which they met with US government officials, Congressmen, think tanks as well as the business community there, updated them on the unique status of Hong Kong under the Basic Law, the intrinsic strengths of Hong Kong as well as Hong Kong's latest situation and measures taken to address current challenges, with a view to illustrating that despite the difficulties faced by Hong Kong, the city remains a highly efficient and safe city, welcoming people from around the US to visit and do business. In respect of the Hong Kong Act, we have been explaining the situation in Hong Kong to relevant persons and organisations, actively clarifying misunderstandings, stressing that Hong Kong and the US are partners which bring mutual benefits to each other, and that the changing of US' policies towards Hong Kong is unwarranted and will bring negative impact on the exchanges of people and businesses between the two places. Moreover, the Chief Executive, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development and officers of the ETOs in the US have written many times to various interlocutors in the US to explain clearly and in detail the situation in Hong Kong and the HKSAR Government's position.

The ETOs in Washington DC, New York and San Francisco have all along maintained regular contact with various sectors in the US, including federal government officials responsible for Hong Kong affairs in the White House, Department of State, Department of Commerce and US Trade Representative, congressional members and their staffers (in particular members and staffers of the Senate and House committees for foreign affairs and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China), think-tanks, media, academia, business communities and other opinion leaders. Through meetings and other arrangements, the ETOs work in earnest to facilitate the understanding of more people on the latest and actual situation in Hong Kong. Among these, in the case of the ETO in Washington DC, the ETO met around 240 US government officials and congressional members/staffers last year, with around 100 being government officials and around 140 being congressional members and their staffers. The ETO reiterated to them that HKSAR Government had spared no effort in implementing "one country, two systems", following free trade and economic policy, and safeguarding the core values of Hong Kong. The ETO explained the latest and actual situation in Hong Kong in order to clarify the misunderstandings that some of them had and maintain Hong Kong's international image and US-Hong Kong bilateral relations. The ETO also highlighted that Hong Kong and the US, being important partners in trade and such other areas as export control, anti-money laundering and counter terrorism, had mutually beneficial bilateral relations, providing significant benefits to the US economy and homeland security, and that any change to current US policy towards Hong Kong could have adverse impact on the people and business-trade interests of both places.

During the past year, the ETOs in the US facilitated visits to Hong Kong by committees relating to US-China relations as well as congressional members and staffers. These included a delegation of the Congressional US-China Working Group, a delegation of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission and a congressional delegation organised by the US-Asia Institute in March, May and August 2019 respectively. The Government also invited two delegations of US congressional staffers to visit Hong Kong in March and October 2019 respectively under the Sponsored Visitors Programme. They met with senior HKSAR Government officials, and were given a wide range of briefings by government bureaux/departments and relevant organisations on the latest development in Hong Kong. Such visits were useful for the visitors to have a better understanding of the situation in Hong Kong such as the economy, opportunities and challenges.

In addition, the Government has been regularly meeting with Consulates-General and foreign chambers of commerce in Hong Kong and updated them on the latest situation of Hong Kong. The International Business Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, with members comprising representatives of foreign chambers of commerce in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, meets regularly and discusses matters relating to the business environment and perceptions of Hong Kong. In the past six months, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development also updated the Consuls General in Hong Kong and leaders of foreign chambers of commerce on the latest situation of Hong Kong and the Government's responding measures through meetings and letters, etc.

The Government and overseas ETOs have been paying close attention to local media reports of other countries on different aspects of Hong Kong affairs. The overseas ETOs would take the initiative to request the media to rectify false reports or false information of media reports. The Government would also proactively make such clarifications and upload the statements on HKSAR Government's relevant webpages and ETOs' social media platforms.

The Government and ETOs in the US will continue to maintain close working relationship with high-level US government officials responsible for Hong Kong affairs, congressional members and their staffers, think-tanks, media, academia and business communities, continue to closely monitor the US Government's policy direction as well as the US political and economic landscape, in particular developments relating to the US Administration's implementation of the Hong Kong Act, and continue to explain the latest situation in Hong Kong to interlocutors in the US so that the reports required under the Hong Kong Act could reflect the actual situation in Hong Kong. The Government will also rebuild the confidence of various US sectors in Hong Kong's future through promotion and other activities.

Operator and managers of unlicensed guesthouses convicted

Two women and a man were charged with contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance at the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts today (January 8). A woman was fined \$8,000, and the other woman and the man were sentenced to two months' imprisonment, suspended for one year.

The courts heard that in June and July last year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), the Home Affairs Department, inspected three suspected unlicensed guesthouses on Nathan Road, Portland Street and Nelson Street in Mong Kok. During the inspections, the OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented rooms in these guesthouses on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's records, these guesthouses did not possess licences under the Ordinance on the days of inspection. The women and the man responsible for operating and managing 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.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaeng@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".