

CE's speech at National Day reception (with video)

Following is the speech (English translation) by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the National Day Reception in Celebration of the 71st Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China today (October 1):

Distinguished guests, fellow citizens,

I am very pleased to celebrate National Day with you, which this year coincides with the Mid-Autumn Festival. With the easing of the third wave of the epidemic that has plagued our city since early July, members of the public have gradually resumed work and students have returned to school. We can all celebrate these special occasions with relatives and friends while strictly observing social distancing and other precautionary measures.

The year 2020 has presented mankind with an unprecedented public health crisis. As of today, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide has exceeded 33 million while the death toll has sadly reached one million. With the exception of China, the epidemic situation around the globe shows no signs of abating and is even rapidly worsening in some places, dealing a heavy blow to various sectors and industries and resulting in rising unemployment. It seems we have some time to go before we can emerge from the economic doldrums.

On the other hand, by vigorously suppressing and strictly controlling the epidemic, our country has already regained its economic momentum. In the first half of this year, there was a "V-shaped" rebound in China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the second quarter with a growth rate of 3.2 per cent after a sharp drop of 6.8 per cent in the first quarter. This has made China a rare bright spot among major economies and has shown once again the shift of the global economic focus from the West to the East.

The success of our country's anti-epidemic work did not come easy. As we saw from TV reports, in order to curb the spread of the virus, our compatriots in the Mainland stayed at home and strictly followed all the rules; cities were locked down; medical and healthcare staff worked round-the-clock to treat patients; supply and support teams acted as one to fight the virus. As President Xi Jinping said at a ceremony commending role models in China's fight against COVID-19 on September 8, the fight against the epidemic was a race against time and a battle that required resolute courage and unwavering determination.

Over the past nine months, the Central Government has been paying great attention to the epidemic situation in Hong Kong and has responded positively to requests from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, including supplying personal protective equipment, exporting mask production machines, assisting Hong Kong residents stranded in the Mainland

and overseas to return home, and supporting three major projects to help Hong Kong suppress the third wave of the epidemic and enhance our capability to treat more patients in future. With the full assistance of the Central Government, the large-scale Universal Community Testing Programme was successfully completed in mid-September, while construction of a temporary hospital and a community treatment facility has also commenced.

The Central Government's assistance to Hong Kong in fighting the epidemic demonstrates, once again, that it has always given Hong Kong its full support in overcoming various difficulties and challenges since our return to the Motherland. Other examples include support rendered to ride out and overcome the serious threats to Hong Kong's financial stability posed by the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the life and health risks and economic recession caused by the 2003 SARS outbreak, and the negative impact of the 2008 global financial tsunami.

Apart from creating a safe haven for us in times of turmoil, and giving us a shot in the arm when needed, the Central Government has also leveraged Hong Kong's role in planning and taking forward the country's overall development and has actively promoted exchanges and co-operation between Hong Kong and the Mainland. The work of the current-term Government is an example. In the past three years, thanks to the support of Central Government leaders and the co-ordination of relevant ministries, the HKSAR Government has signed over 90 co-operation agreements with the Mainland. Strategically important ones include the "Framework Agreement on Deepening Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Cooperation in the Development of the Greater Bay Area" signed with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the governments of Guangdong and Macao in July 2017; the "Arrangement between the NDRC and the Government of the HKSAR for Advancing Hong Kong's Full Participation in and Contribution to the Belt and Road Initiative" signed with the NDRC in December 2017; the "Arrangement on Enhancing Innovation and Technology Cooperation between the Mainland and Hong Kong" signed with the Ministry of Science and Technology in September 2018; the "Arrangement on Reciprocal Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters by the Courts of the Mainland and of the HKSAR" signed with the Supreme People's Court in January 2019; and the "Agreement Concerning Amendment to the CEPA Agreement on Trade in Services" signed with the Ministry of Commerce in November 2019. All this shows that the Central Government always gives us strong backing and helps maintain Hong Kong's prosperity and stability, whether Hong Kong is facing good times or bad, difficulties or opportunities.

To help extract Hong Kong from our economic predicament, we must create new engines of economic growth with the continued support of the Central Government. We have to help Hong Kong's professional services sector and enterprises target business opportunities in the Mainland market and capitalise on Hong Kong's unique role as a connector to the world under the development model of "domestic and international dual circulation" propelled by our country. The HKSAR Government will participate more actively in the drafting of the outline of our country's 14th Five-Year Plan, and will seek the Central Government's support to strengthen and enhance Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre and a global aviation hub. We will also

take forward the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area at full steam and deepen our work with Shenzhen in developing an international innovation and technology hub.

Having gone through the social unrest arising from the legislative amendment exercise of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance in mid-2019, and having implemented the National Security Law in mid-2020, we should see very clearly that if we are to keep Hong Kong moving forward, overcome economic challenges, and meet public aspirations for improved livelihoods and democracy, we must have a safe and stable social environment, adhere to the "One Country" principle, safeguard national sovereignty and security, correctly understand the relationship between "One Country" and "Two Systems", and act in accordance with the Constitution and the Basic Law. Over the past three months, the plain truth is and it is obvious to see that stability has been restored to society while national security has been safeguarded, and our people can continue to enjoy their basic rights and freedoms in accordance with the law. So, no matter how severe some foreign governments, holding "double-standards", are going to level unjustified accusations against the authorities in charge of implementing the National Security Law, or aggressively imposing further sanctions against HKSAR officials responsible for safeguarding national security, I and my relevant colleagues will continue to discharge our duty to safeguard national security in accordance with the law without fear or anxiety.

I believe that as long as we uphold the "One Country, Two Systems" principle and the Basic Law wholeheartedly, work together to seize the opportunities presented by our country's new development model, communicate in a sensible way and find common ground among differences, we can certainly make Hong Kong, our home, an even better place.

May I wish our country continued prosperity and progress, Hong Kong social harmony and stability, and everyone a happy National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival.

Thank you very much.