

Correctional Services Department

Annual Review 2023 (with photos)

The following is the translation of the speech given by the Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Wong Kwok-hing, at the annual press conference today (February 22):

Foreword

In 2023, Hong Kong stepped out of the darkness of the epidemic, allowing our society to begin moving back to normality gradually. As more and more people involved in the black-clad violence or those contravening the National Security Law have been remanded or sentenced, Hong Kong has achieved a major transition from chaos to order, and now embarks on a new era of advancing from stability to prosperity. Shouldering the mission of safeguarding national security, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) was committed to ensuring the effective delivery of its custodial and rehabilitation work in the past year to maintain the safety and stability of our society. At the same time, the CSD has been proactively promoting national security, crime prevention, anti-drug and supporting offender rehabilitation messages, and extending its reach beyond the prison walls by promoting education on crime prevention in the community, dedicating its efforts to nurturing future pillars of society.

(1) Overview of penal population and supervisees

In 2023, the number of new admissions (including convicted persons, remands and detainees) markedly increased to 17 268 from 13 246 in 2022, representing an increase of 30 per cent. Besides, the average daily penal population at correctional facilities also increased to 8 498 persons in 2023 from 7 613 persons in 2022. The average daily occupancy rate rose from 67 per cent to 75 per cent.

In 2023, the average daily number of remands hit a new record high since 2000 to 3 096 persons, representing an increase of 16 per cent as compared with 2 666 persons in 2022. To ease the strain on Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre, some of the capacities of Stanley Prison and Tung Tau Correctional Institution have been deployed to admit adult male remands. Besides, having obtained funding approval from the Legislative Council, the CSD will commence the in-situ partial redevelopment of Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre in mid-2024 to increase its capacity for adult male remands by 410 places, so as to alleviate the overcrowding problem of the reception centre in the long run. The department will closely monitor the changes in the penal population and deploy resources flexibly, having regard to the actual operational needs so as to adjust the admission capacity for remands in a timely manner.

On the other hand, the department has changed the use of Nei Kwu Correctional Institution to detain adult female detainees under the

Immigration Ordinance since May 18, 2023. Coupled with the recommissioning of Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution for the detention of adult male detainees since May 28, 2021, the number of detainees substantially increased by more than three-fold, from 131 in 2021 to 580 in 2023.

In 2023, the number of admissions to correctional institutions owing to involvement in offences relating to the black-clad violence (including riots, unlawful assembly) and the contravention of the National Security Law stood high at 950 (seven of them were involved in the contravention of the National Security Law). Compared to 829 in 2022, the number of such admissions rose by 121, representing an increase of 15 per cent.

As at December 31, 2023, the number of persons in custody involved in the black-clad violence and those contravening the National Security Law was 776, representing an increase of 49 per cent as compared with 522 as at December 31, 2022.

In 2023, the number of newly admitted persons in custody of high security risk (i.e. Category A) was 153. Among them, 63 per cent were involved in drug-related offences, 20 per cent in murder or manslaughter, and the remaining 17 per cent in other serious offences. As at December 31, 2023, the total number of Category A persons in custody was 629, representing an increase of 4 per cent as compared with 603 as at December 31, 2022.

Apart from managing persons in custody, the CSD also provides statutory supervision to rehabilitated offenders to facilitate their reintegration into society. As at December 31, 2023, 1 145 persons were still under statutory supervision, representing a decrease of 4 per cent as compared with 1 193 persons as at December 31, 2022.

(2) Custodial work

The CSD has all along aimed to enhance governance and uphold the principle of staying vigilant and tackling challenges without fear. To this end, the department keeps reviewing and enhancing its daily management, preventive measures, contingency plans as well as facilities and equipment in order to proactively curb all illicit activities and acts of indiscipline at correctional institutions.

To ensure a safe and secure custodial environment, the department has been adopting the "zero tolerance" strategy against the smuggling of drugs into institutions. Last year, there were 16 cases of seized drugs, representing an almost two-fold increase as compared with six cases in 2022. Five of the cases involved body-cavity concealment of drugs found in newly admitted persons in custody through X-ray body scanning; another six cases involved drugs found during searching of newly admitted persons in custody bodies or clothing; and the remaining five cases involved drugs found in the mail sent to persons in custody or articles handed in by visitors. In addition, the department continued its nip-it-in-the-bud strategy by conducting a total of 12 538 joint search/special search/night raid operations in correctional institutions last year, covering 20 541 locations,

which were similar to the corresponding figures in 2022.

In 2023, the number of disciplinary charges against persons in custody was 5 335. Counted against the penal population, there were 628 disciplinary cases per 1 000 persons in custody, representing an increase of 5 per cent as compared with 600 cases in 2022. The top three charges were "offending good order and discipline", "possession of any unauthorised article" and "disobeying the orders of correctional officers", which accounted for 32 per cent, 28 per cent and 18 per cent of the total number of disciplinary charges respectively. In 2023, there were 3 011 persons in custody subject to disciplinary charges, representing an increase of 371 persons, or 14 per cent, as compared with 2 640 persons in 2022. Among them, 494 committed disciplinary offences three or more times, involving 2 294 disciplinary charges, which accounted for 43 per cent of the total number of disciplinary charges.

In 2023, a total of 351 cases involving violent acts were recorded, representing a decrease of 3 per cent as compared with 361 cases in 2022. These cases mainly involved fighting among persons in custody and assaulting others. Among these cases, 22 cases of a more serious nature were referred to the Police for follow-up, representing an increase of 38 per cent as compared with 16 cases in 2022. The number of correctional officers who were injured after being attacked or while stopping violent acts was 15, representing an increase of 25 per cent over 2022.

In 2023, four cases of concerted acts of indiscipline in correctional institutions were recorded, representing a decrease of one case over 2022. These four cases of indiscipline included one case of collective making of unreasonable demands against the institutional management measures which occurred in Tung Tau Correctional Institution; one case of a group fight which occurred in Stanley Prison and two cases of group attacks which occurred in Pik Uk Prison and Pak Sha Wan Correctional Institution respectively. The number of participants involved in the above incidents was 51 in total.

Despite the noticeable increases in both the number of new admissions and the penal population in the past year, correctional officers continued to stand fast to their posts, strive to maintain the good order and discipline among persons in custody, and at the same time strengthen intelligence collection and step up search operations to prevent illicit activities, acts of indiscipline and violent incidents.

In 2023, the Regional Response Team (RRT) carried out a total of five operations, which were similar to the six operations in 2022, to support the security work of correctional institutions. The operations involved the handling of incidents like group fights and group attacks among persons in custody. The number of high-risk escort cases increased from 342 in 2022 to 392 in 2023, representing an increase of 15 per cent. In addition, the CSD provided additional training facilities and equipment in the training base of the RRT last year to enhance team members' tactical skills and emergency response capabilities.

Apart from combating illicit activities and acts of indiscipline among persons in custody, correctional officers must stay vigilant at all times to detect and prevent any self-harm acts by persons in custody. A total of 30 self-harm cases were recorded in 2023, representing a decrease of 29 per cent as compared with 42 cases in 2022. While correctional officers were able to stop most of the self-harm cases in time, one male person in custody died despite rescue effort in 2023. The case has been referred to the Police for investigation and a subsequent death inquest will be conducted.

In recent years, owing to the rising prevalence of chronic diseases and the large number of persons in custody with a history of drug abuse and special medical needs, the number of medical escorts has remained at a high level. Human resources required for conducting medical escorts were 45 089 man days in 2023, which was similar to the 45 323 man days in 2022.

In addition, to raise persons in custody's awareness of hepatitis C, the department, in collaboration with the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong, has launched a three-year pilot programme for hepatitis C virus screening in Stanley Prison since October 2023, aiming at inviting about 500 eligible persons in custody to join the programme on a voluntary basis and providing them with hepatitis C testing service and medicine treatment. As at December 31, 2023, 106 persons in custody have joined the programme.

To tackle very hot weather, the CSD has been exploring and introducing new measures in recent years to improve air ventilation in correctional institutions. Apart from installing anti-suicide cell safety fans inside the cells in various institutions, installing additional and replacing fans and ventilation systems in all institutions, replacing old-style non-vented gates progressively, and installing new windows that allow better air flow, the department commissioned a relevant works department in 2023 to apply a cooling coating invented by a local university on the rooftops of some buildings at two institutions to test its heat-reducing effect, and favourable results were achieved. The department will discuss with the works department regarding the application of the cooling coating to suitable correctional facilities subject to the availability of resources. In addition, the department is trying out solar control films on the windows of facilities for day activities and the cells in some correctional institutions which would reduce heat absorption through reflection of sunlight, thereby achieving the effect of lowering the indoor temperature.

(3) Rehabilitation

In 2023, the department enhanced its rehabilitation work on all fronts, including strengthening the determination of persons in custody to rehabilitate, extending the reach of rehabilitation programmes beyond the prison walls, and making an all-out effort to seek participation in and support for rehabilitation work from all sectors of the community, with a view to assisting persons in custody to turn over a new leaf and reintegrate into society.

To address the special rehabilitation needs of persons in custody involved in the black-clad violence and contravening the National Security Law, the department continued to launch a number of diversified rehabilitation programmes under Project PATH. To enhance young persons in custody's knowledge of Chinese history and their sense of national identity, the department has launched a series of diversified educational activities to enhance their knowledge of the Chinese traditional culture, foster good character and moral education, and teach them to appreciate and pass down Chinese traditional culture. Moreover, the department has set up flag-raising teams in institutions for young persons in custody in order to strengthen national education.

Besides, the department set up Multi-purpose Family and Rehabilitation Service Centres in Sha Tin and Tuen Mun respectively in March last year to provide pre-booked video social visit services for relatives and friends of persons in custody in need on one hand. On the other hand, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can provide rehabilitation services to persons in custody and rehabilitated offenders. The department has also set up a psychological and family counselling services centre, "ReConnect Hub", specially designed for adult supervisees under statutory supervision in the Sha Tin Multi-purpose Family and Rehabilitation Service Centre to provide them with psychological and family counselling services etc. It aims to help rehabilitated offenders through a multipronged approach regain self-confidence and rebuild harmonious family and social relationships, so that they can reintegrate into society.

Last year, the department established three Parent-child Centres in Hei Ling Chau Addiction Treatment Centre, Tong Fuk Correctional Institution and Stanley Prison respectively. These centres are set up to provide a suitable environment for male persons in custody to meet their children aged under 11 for parent-child interaction so as to enable adult male persons in custody to build a better relationship with their children, thus strengthening their determination to rehabilitate. Meanwhile, the department is working with a local university and an NGO to study the effectiveness of parent-child centres in correctional institutions for male offenders and how to reduce intergenerational offending.

On education, the CSD signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the eight University Grants Committee-funded universities in April 2023 to establish a long-term partnership so as to enable persons in custody who were university students before imprisonment to continue their studies if they wish to do so. In late October last year, the Ethics College was established to offer a one-year full-time Diploma of Applied Education programme to adult persons in custody. Upon completion of the programme and obtaining a pass in the examination, persons in custody will be qualified to the academic level equivalent to the Level 2 standard in five subjects (including Chinese Language and English Language) in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE). Apart from assisting adult persons in custody to equip themselves, the Ethics College provides them with opportunities for upward mobility. After obtaining the necessary qualifications, they can

choose to enrol in local post-secondary education programmes or apply for work related to their chosen subjects.

The overall passing rate of public examinations taken by persons in custody was 82.7 per cent last year (72.7 per cent and 85.8 per cent for adult and young persons in custody respectively). One person in custody obtained a total of 29 marks in six papers under the HKDSE. Another eight met the general entrance requirements for local universities. Moreover, eight persons in custody were awarded bachelor's degrees and another one was awarded a master's degree.

On vocational training, the department provides 13 market-oriented vocational training courses to young sentenced persons, and 44 vocational training courses with more than 1 400 training places for lawfully residing adult sentenced persons who are due for discharge within 24 months and eligible for employment to enrol on a voluntary basis. All the courses are co-organised with local training bodies, and are recognised under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) or accredited by the market, which facilitate the employment of rehabilitated persons or help them enrol in bridging or progressive courses. In view of the increasing number of remanded persons, the department organised for the first time last year vocational training courses with a total of more than 500 training places for remanded persons to enrol on a voluntary basis, which cover a wide range of industries such as food and beverages, construction, hairdressing and business.

Last year, the overall passing rate of vocational training examinations taken by persons in custody was 99.7 per cent (99.7 per cent and 99.8 per cent for adult and young persons in custody respectively). Their employment rates after six months of employment follow-up period upon release were 89.2 per cent and 84.7 per cent respectively.

Over the years, the department has been promoting offender rehabilitation and appealing to the public to support and accept rehabilitated offenders so as to reduce their reoffending risks, thereby building a more stable and harmonious society. Over the past 20 years and so, based on the year of discharge, Hong Kong's recidivism rate (the percentage of readmission of local persons in custody to correctional institutions following conviction for a new offence within two years after discharge) has recorded a significant decrease from 39.9 per cent in 2000 to 21.7 per cent in 2021. The encouraging result reflects the perseverance and hard work of correctional officers, the firm determination of persons in custody and rehabilitated offenders to turn over a new leaf, as well as the support for offender rehabilitation from all sectors of the community.

The recidivism rate decreased by 1.6 percentage points in 2021 from 23.3 per cent in 2020. The recidivism rate of young sentenced persons decreased from 12.2 per cent in 2020 to 10.3 per cent in 2021, representing a decrease of 1.9 percentage points, while the recidivism rate of adult sentenced persons decreased by 1.5 percentage points from 23.9 per cent in 2020 to 22.4 per cent in 2021.

(4) Community education

The CSD's Rehabilitation Pioneer Project (RPP) provides 12 community education activities to disseminate to young people the four key messages of safeguarding our country and home, leading a law-abiding and drug-free life as well as supporting offender rehabilitation. Last year, the department stepped up its efforts in fostering devotion to our country and home among young people and enhancing their sense of responsibility and ownership.

To this end, the department has proactively promoted patriotic education in the training of its youth uniform group Rehabilitation Pioneer Leaders (RPLs). Apart from the inclusion of Chinese-style foot drill practice and flag raising in its training, RPL trainees were arranged to visit all the cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) for exchanges and learning last year. Moreover, the CSD launched a certificate course, namely Certificate in Criminology and Criminal Justice in Hong Kong, pitched at Level 3 under the HKQF last October. Another certificate course, namely Certificate in Positive Traits and Healthy Life also pitched at Level 3 under the HKQF will be offered in June this year, in order to strengthen young leaders' awareness of building a rule of law society together and cultivate positive thinking. To promote the active participation of RPL trainees in public affairs, the department has arranged for them to be in charge of the content production of the YouTube channel "Captain Gor". They have also been arranged to visit primary schools across the territory on board the educational promotion vehicle "Rehabilitation Express", so that they can promote the four key messages of the RPP among primary school students as their seniors. Last year, the RPL establishment was expanded from three regions to five regions, namely the Hong Kong Island, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories South and New Territories North. A school-based training mode was also introduced. At present, the total number of RPL trainees is over 400, representing a significant increase of 78 per cent as compared with the figure in late 2022.

Besides, the department has also applied the metaverse into the Personal Encounter with Prisoners Scheme under the RPP since last November. Young persons in custody have been arranged to interact and chat with participating secondary students through the metaverse despite geographical constraints, thus enabling more secondary students to join the activity and think about the dire consequences of committing crimes.

Last year, a total of 44 015 participants joined the RPP activities, including 41 683 youth participants, representing a marked increase of 75 per cent as compared with 23 777 in 2022. The activities were well received and drew positive response from the community.

The department also launched an official Instagram account last year to enable more young people to obtain an understanding of the CSD's work and its significance. Apart from attracting them to apply for job vacancies of the CSD, it also helps promote national security, national education, crime prevention, anti-drug and supporting offender rehabilitation messages.

(5) Human resources

In 2023, a total of 46 Officers and 290 Assistant Officers II were recruited. As at December 31, 2023, there were 713 vacancies for disciplined staff, accounting for 11 per cent of the overall establishment of the department. The department continued to implement the Post-retirement Service Contract Scheme to relieve the manpower strain. As at December 31, 2023, a total of 249 retirees were recruited. About 55 Officers are expected to be recruited this year, and the year-round recruitment for the post of Assistant Officer II will continue to fill the relevant vacancies.

In order to attract more new blood with an aspiration to serve the community to join the CSD, the department proactively adopted multipronged recruitment strategies last year, including adopting new physical fitness test standards for Officer and Assistant Officer II applicants; introducing the Assistant Officer II Language Test (Chinese/English) to provide applicants with an additional way to meet the language proficiency requirements; and arranging the physical fitness test for recruitment, the Basic Law and National Security Law Test, the group interview and the selection interview for Assistant Officer II to be completed within a single day instead of two days before to expedite the recruitment selection process. Moreover, recruitment exercises were changed from being conducted twice a month to once a month so as to speed up the filling of vacancies.

In view of the growing number of Hong Kong students choosing to pursue further studies on the Mainland, the CSD organised recruitment and promotion activities at Huaqiao University in Xiamen and Jinan University in Guangzhou respectively in November 2023. Students who applied for job vacancies were arranged to undergo on-site physical fitness tests on their campus, and the recruitment activities were well received.

Besides, the department continued to work closely with different support service centres for ethnic minorities and schools last year. A variety of activities were organised to attract non-ethnic Chinese to apply for the vacancies of the CSD. In 2023, an additional 10 non-ethnic Chinese correctional officers were appointed. As at December 31, 2023, a total of 57 non-ethnic Chinese correctional officers are employed by the department.

On staff training, to enhance patriotism and national security awareness among correctional officers, the department has included training elements of national security, national education and patriotic education in the recruit training and training courses for serving staff since 2023, including inviting legal professionals and renowned scholars to host talks and sharing sessions, and arranging study visits and exchanges on the Mainland for correctional staff.

With a view to expanding exchanges on professional training with Mainland law enforcement agencies and fostering mutual development, the CSD and the National Police University for Criminal Justice signed a new co-operation agreement in April 2023, which sets out the arrangements for exchange visits, the sending of officers from both sides to receive training

and participate in lectures, as well as the organisation of seminars, etc on issues of mutual concern.

(6) Application of innovation and technology

Last year, the department continued to introduce various types of innovative technology projects in correctional facilities to assist the institutional management to raise management efficiency and provide convenience to the public, such as the implementation of the Robotic Dog Patrol System on a trial basis at Shek Pik Prison and the introduction of the Smart Health Sensing System in the hospital of Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre.

In addition, the department continued its effort in realising the Government's objective of building a smart city by implementing e-services. In November last year, the Social Visit e-Booking Service was fully implemented in all institutions, which allows relatives and friends of persons in custody to make appointments and register for visits through the department's webpage or its mobile app. As at December 31, 2023, about 4 900 visitors have registered as users, accounting for 26 per cent of the active visitors. According to survey data, some visitors of individual institutions can save up to 90 minutes of queuing time.

On the other hand, to promote the application of innovation and technology and high-quality development, the department and the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTP) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in July last year to deepen the co-operation and promote the sustainable development of the "smart prison". The CSD and HKSTP will jointly explore innovative solutions in three aspects over the next three years, including the identification and matching of market-proven innovative solutions to address the operational needs of the CSD and challenges faced by the department; the setup of a Penal Lab in an actual operating environment where tailor-made innovative solutions can be tested; and arranging regular meetings and exchanges through active liaison with different sectors including the innovation and technology industry and academia to create collaboration opportunities.

(7) Priorities in the coming year

We will continue to stand steadfast at our posts, uphold the principle of good governance, and work in unison to accomplish our mission and tell good stories about the CSD and Hong Kong through introducing new initiatives on custodial work, rehabilitation and community education, so that the CSD can become an internationally acclaimed Correctional Service.

On custodial work, the department will continue to introduce elements of innovation and technology into correctional facilities so as to enhance operational efficiency and strengthen the self-management ability of persons in custody. These include the installation of the Persons in Custody Integrated Intelligent Communication System, the Electric Locks Security System, the Smart Health Sensing System and the Contactless Vital Sign Detection System, etc in different institutions progressively. The department

will also launch the Approved Hand-in Articles e-Ordering Service, a new electronic service to be introduced for the convenience of the public, which will enable relatives and friends of persons in custody to purchase approved hand-in articles for them via the department's website or its mobile app. The system will not only enhance the operational efficiency of the department, but also provide convenience to relatives and friends of persons in custody.

Moreover, the department is making preparatory work for the first Greater Bay Area Correctional Tactical Skills Competition to be held this year, which aims to foster the exchange of experiences in crisis management between the CSD and correctional authorities in the GBA, with a view to enhancing the tactical skills of the response teams and their capability in handling emergencies.

The CSD will host the 42nd Asian and Pacific Conference of Correctional Administrators in November this year, during which heads of correctional services and their delegations from over 30 countries and places in the Asia-Pacific region will conduct professional exchanges on correctional work and its future development. The conference will not only strengthen regional co-operation, but also enable the CSD's counterparts from different places to witness the unique advantages and latest developments of Hong Kong's correctional system.

As for rehabilitation work, the department will launch the Rehabilitation Dog Services early this year to provide animal-assisted therapies to persons in custody by clinical psychologists at Lo Wu Correctional Institution and Phoenix House, with a view to improving the depression and anxiety of persons in custody, and reducing their violent tendencies.

The department plans to set up the Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit this year with renowned international experts to be invited to serve as consultants. In addition, capitalising on Hong Kong's unique advantage of bridging East and West, the CSD will strengthen its professional liaison with relevant Mainland authorities in order to expand and enhance its capability in conducting research. Through promoting research and making reference to the latest international research findings, the department aims to enhance the development and strategic planning of its rehabilitation services.

This year, the department also plans to set up two family therapy centres for rehabilitated drug addicts under statutory supervision, and rehabilitated persons with violent tendencies or radical thoughts at the Multi-purpose Family and Rehabilitation Service Centres in Tuen Mun and Sheung Shui respectively, with a view to extending the in-prison psychological and family counselling services to the community, thereby facilitating the smooth reintegration of rehabilitated persons into society.

To promote community-wide support for rehabilitated persons, the department will organise the Rehabilitation Partners Award Presentation Ceremony this year to give recognition to individuals or groups, including NGOs, businesses, employers, etc, for their continuous support for

rehabilitation work, with a view to encouraging different sectors of the community to become our rehabilitation partners, thus developing a broader support network for building a more stable and harmonious society through concerted efforts.

As regards community education, the RPP will continue to aim at disseminating the four key messages of safeguarding our country and home, leading a law-abiding and drug-free life as well as supporting offender rehabilitation. Greater efforts will be made along the following three principles in nurturing a new generation of law-abiding young people who will enthusiastically contribute to society.

The department will adopt a "prevention-first" youth-based principle to strengthen the promotion of various crime prevention messages among young people. Apart from utilising different social media platforms and producing more interesting videos targeting the younger generation so as to enhance their crime prevention awareness and cultivate positive thinking, we will work with other relevant departments to launch publicity campaigns to promote crime prevention and anti-drug messages taking into account the youth crime trend.

The department will also encourage young people to make good use of their status as future pillars of society. Apart from continuously arranging for RPL trainees to participate in different community education and crime prevention activities to unleash their leadership potential and exert influence over their young peers, the department will mobilise RPL trainees to actively take part in various charity affairs so as to nurture a sense of commitment and a caring heart for the community.

Lastly, upholding the principle of sustainable development, the department will set up a membership system for the RPP to recruit members from primary and secondary students who have participated in RPP activities. The members will then be systematically arranged to join different activities promoting national security, national education, crime prevention, anti-drug and support for offender rehabilitation messages, as well as cultural exchange activities. The new membership system will not only make youth development work more systematic and sustainable, but also help recruit young people with great potential to become RPLs, with a view to bringing in new blood to the department's youth uniformed group.

