

HKSAR Government firmly rejects and strongly disapproves of misleading and slanderous remarks by foreign Catholic leaders against cases involving Lai Chee-ying

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) today (November 9) firmly rejected and strongly disapproved of the misleading and slanderous remarks jointly made by 10 foreign Catholic leaders against the law enforcement actions and legal proceedings in respect of the cases involving Lai Chee-ying and their request for immediate and unconditional release of him.

The HKSAR Government spokesman said, "The HKSAR Government firmly rejects and strongly disapproves of the fact-twisting remarks made by the foreign Catholic leaders to inappropriately interfere in the HKSAR's internal affairs and the HKSAR courts' independent exercise of judicial power. Any person, regardless of his or her identity, who attempts to interfere with the judicial proceedings in the HKSAR in order to procure a defendant's evasion of the criminal justice process, is blatantly undermining the rule of law of the HKSAR. Making a statement with the intent to interfere with or obstruct the course of justice, or engaging in a conduct with the same intent, is very likely to constitute the offence of criminal contempt of court or the offence of perverting the course of justice."

The spokesman reiterated, "Hong Kong is a society underpinned by the rule of law and has always adhered to the principle that laws must be obeyed and lawbreakers held accountable. Article 25 of the Basic Law provides that all Hong Kong residents shall be equal before the law. All law enforcement actions taken by the law enforcement agencies of the HKSAR are based on evidence, strictly according to the law and for the acts of the people concerned, and have nothing to do with their professions, political beliefs or backgrounds. It would be totally contrary to the rule of law for someone to suggest that certain groups of people could enjoy privileges and break the law without getting arrested or bearing legal responsibilities due to their capacity. Everyone, including journalists, should abide by the law.

"Under Article 85 of the Basic Law, the courts of the HKSAR shall exercise judicial power independently, free from any interference. The Judiciary of the HKSAR exercises judicial power independently in accordance with the law, and everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to a fair hearing. The courts decide cases strictly in accordance with the evidence and all applicable laws. Cases will never be handled any differently owing to the professions, political beliefs or backgrounds of the persons involved. The prosecution has the burden to prove beyond reasonable doubt the

commission of an offence before a defendant may be convicted by the court. In all the cases involving Lai Chee-ying, he had fully exercised his right to defend himself and the right to appeal, and the verdicts and sentences, if any, were given by the courts exercising judicial power independently, based on applicable laws, facts and evidence after open trials and hearings. Also, the detailed reasons for sentence are contained in the publicly available judgment."

The spokesman stressed, "The HKSAR shall continue, in accordance with the law, to effectively prevent, suppress and punish acts and activities that endanger national security and also to safeguard the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong people. The HKSAR Government strongly urges the foreign Catholic leaders to discern facts from fallacies, and immediately stop interfering in the HKSAR's internal affairs and the HKSAR courts' independent exercise of judicial power."