

# HKSAR Government strongly condemns deliberate smearing and divisive act by anti-China organisation "Hong Kong Watch" on Basic Law Article 23 legislation

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government on March 13 expressed its strongest condemnation against the statement by anti-China organisation "Hong Kong Watch" together with 16 co-signatories, which deliberately misled the public and smeared the requirement on "disclosure of commission by others of offence of treason" in the Basic Law Article 23 legislation that it targets religions, attempting to provoke discontent among religious personnel and followers against the legislation.

A spokesman for the Government said, "The offences of treason and misprision of treason, no matter in Hong Kong or in other common law jurisdictions, have existed for a long time. They do not target religious personnel or followers, and have nothing to do with freedom of religion. In any case, freedom of religion is not for protecting anyone who has committed serious offences from legal sanctions. Besides, 'Hong Kong Watch' has omitted to mention an important fact, i.e. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which was based on Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) clearly stipulates that freedom of religion may be subject to limitations to protect public safety, order, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

"The HKSAR Government has proposed to codify the offence of misprision of treason under the common law as the requirement on 'disclosure of commission by others of offence of treason' with appropriate enhancement. However, anti-China organisation 'Hong Kong Watch' and the co-signatories forcibly linked the relevant requirement to freedom of religion to, on one hand, smear the legislative work using religion as a pretext and, on the other hand, attempt to provoke the repulsion of the religious personnel and followers against the HKSAR Government. They even made demagogic and exaggerated remarks in an attempt to mislead the international community into believing that the proposal by the HKSAR Government runs contrary to the international standard, thereby creating a negative impression of the Basic Law Article 23 legislation, demonstrating their malicious intention. It is necessary for the HKSAR Government to express its strongest condemnation.

"First, ordinary citizens, regardless of whether they are religious personnel or followers or not, would absolutely not commit treason. Treason is an extremely serious and very rare offence endangering national security, which will only be violated in extreme conditions, including levying war against China, or instigating a foreign country to invade China with force.

If a person really conducts such acts and activities, it would be absolutely reasonable, necessary and justified to request the Chinese citizen who knows about the acts to disclose the commission of the offence to the law enforcement agencies of the HKSAR, so that the law enforcement agencies can take timely enforcement actions in accordance with the law to protect the lives and property of the community.

"We must also point out that, misprision of treason remains a common law offence in the United Kingdom; while countries with a common law system, including the United States, Canada and Singapore, have codified the offence of misprision of treason, and the above-mentioned countries have not specify relevant exceptions. 'Hong Kong Watch' and the co-signatories have not mentioned the relevant provisions in the countries concerned before groundlessly attacking under the guise of religious matters the HKSAR Government's legislative work on safeguarding national security. It is a blatant, shameless and barbaric intervention, and is also a typical example of double standards.

"Not only is 'Hong Kong Watch' an anti-China organisation, many of its members are also anti-China and destabilising forces in the front line, who have called for so-called 'sanctions' by foreign countries against officials of the Central People's Government and the HKSAR Government repeatedly. Members of the public in Hong Kong, the religious sector and the international community should see the organisation in its true colours and not to be misled by its erroneous remarks with ulterior motives."