

HKSAR Government strongly disapproves of and rejects smears by “Media Freedom Coalition” against press freedom in Hong Kong

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) today (September 10) strongly disapproved of and rejected the fact-twisting remarks and baseless smears by "Media Freedom Coalition", whose members are claimed to be from foreign countries including the United States and the United Kingdom, against the verdict of a "conspiracy to publish and/or reproduce seditious publication" case, the safeguarding of freedom of the press, etc, in the HKSAR.

A spokesman for the HKSAR Government said, "We have emphasised time and again, and it is necessary to reiterate that Hong Kong citizens enjoy freedom of the press and freedom of speech as protected under the Basic Law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights. In fact, the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance clearly stipulate that human rights shall be respected and protected in safeguarding national security. The rights and freedoms, including the freedoms of the press, of speech and of publication, enjoyed by Hong Kong people under the Basic Law and the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as applicable to the HKSAR, are protected in accordance with the law."

The spokesman stressed, "Like all other places in the world, such rights and freedoms are not absolute. Journalists, like everyone else, have an obligation to abide by all the laws. Their freedom of commenting on and criticising government policies remains uninhibited as long as they do not violate the law. The court, in its reasons for verdict, has analysed in detail the duties and responsibilities of the media, specifically highlighting that, according to Article 19(3) of the ICCPR, when the media and relevant personnel publish opinions, information and articles, they must observe and discharge 'special duties and responsibilities', including protection of national security or public order.

"The reasons for verdict have also pointed out clearly that the ideology of Stand News was localism which excluded China, and that it even became a tool to smear and vilify the Central Authorities and the HKSAR Government during the 'anti-extradition amendment bill incidents'. The court found that the relevant articles, without any objective basis, attacked the NSL and the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200) and relevant law enforcement and prosecutorial process; spread hatred and anti-government sentiment with disinformation; attacked the law enforcement by the Police and glorified the behaviour of rioters – in other words, they were not based on facts.

"The court further cited precedents from the European Court of Human

Rights regarding press freedom, pointing out that the European Convention on Human Rights does not guarantee a wholly unrestricted freedom of speech even with respect to press coverage on matters of serious public concern. The most crucial point is that journalists must act in good faith and on accurate factual basis and provide reliable and precise information in accordance with the tenets of 'responsible journalism' in order to enjoy the protection of their rights to freedom of speech and press freedom.

"In the past, the US and some Western countries had also carried out law enforcement actions against the dissemination of disinformation, incitement of hatred, and glorification of violence in their own countries. Recent examples include a British journalist reportedly being arrested by the UK police for allegedly violating the UK Terrorism Act while working on coverage related to Palestine. The disparagement of the HKSAR District Court's verdict by the relevant countries only exposes their double standards.

"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. The law enforcement agencies of the HKSAR have been taking law enforcement actions based on evidence and strictly in accordance with the law in respect of the acts of the persons or organisations concerned, which have nothing to do with freedom of the press, or the background of any person or organisation."

The spokesman said, "The HKSAR will continue to resolutely discharge the responsibility of safeguarding national security and effectively prevent, suppress and impose punishment for acts and activities that endanger national security in accordance with the law, and safeguard the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong people in accordance with the law at the same time."