

LCQ10: Provision of air support by GFS

Following is a question by the Hon Hui Chi-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

It is learnt that since June this year, some members of the public and the media found helicopters hovering in the air above during a number of large-scale demonstrations; and some demonstrators subsequently found that their clothes and exposed skin of the arms and legs were stained with fluorescent powder. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the government departments which have, since June this year, requested the Government Flying Service to assist in their operations in respect of large-scale public events by dispatching helicopters, and set out by department the following information on each of the operations of the helicopters: (i) the flight area, (ii) the purpose of the operation, and (iii) the type and quantity of the equipment brought along by the helicopter for the operation; whether the equipment brought along each time was adjusted according to the purpose of the operation; and

(2) whether the Government has, since June this year, sprayed powder from helicopters over members of the public participating in large-scale public events; if so, of the (i) legal basis, (ii) purposes and (iii) number of such operations, as well as (iv) the chemical composition and total quantity of the powder used; whether the Government has assessed the impact of the chemical composition of the powder on public health; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Since June 9, 2019, more than 680 public protests and assemblies have been staged, and nearly 190 of them ended up in violence. Violent acts in relation to processions and assemblies have been escalating in the past five months, with rioters blocking roads, setting fire, vandalising public properties, shops and different facilities, and violently attacking people holding different opinions. These acts have seriously disrupted public peace and posed extensive danger to the community. In view of the serious illegal acts, the Police had to take necessary actions to curb violence, restore public order and public safety, as well as protect the safety of members of the public.

The Government Flying Service (GFS) is one of the disciplined forces in Hong Kong. Its statutory functions are provided in the Government Flying

Service Ordinance (Cap 322). Under section 5(1), GFS shall provide flying services to the Government for such purposes as are incidental to the administration of Hong Kong. Under section 5(2), GFS supports the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and other law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in carrying out their law enforcement duties (such as combating crime, terrorism and smuggling activities), and provides various services including those for search and rescue and casualty evacuation purposes, fighting fires, conducting aerial surveys and medical services purposes, etc. Since its establishment in 1993, GFS has been supporting HKPF and other LEAs in carrying out their law enforcement actions in accordance with such provision.

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) Between June 1 and October 31, 2019, GFS made 22 helicopter flights at HKPF's request to provide air support for police operations in public events. The helicopters concerned carried regular equipment (e.g. communication devices, rescue equipment and rescue hoist) and no additional equipment. The flight areas covered in air support are set out below:

Flight area	Number of flights
Hong Kong Island	5
Kowloon	8
New Territories	1
More than one of the above areas	8
Total	22

(2) GFS never sprayed powder or other substances over any person participating in public events while providing air support for law enforcement actions. The Police clarified at a press conference on September 3 that the allegation concerned was not true.