

## LCQ10: Sponsored Visitors Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (January 22):

Question:

Currently, through the Sponsored Visitors Programme (the Programme), the Visits Sub-division of the Information Services Department invites government and political leaders, academics and think-tank members, as well as leading figures in the business and financial sectors to visit Hong Kong to enhance their understanding of the city. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in each of the past five years, of (i) the funds earmarked for the implementation of the Programme and any surplus funds, (ii) the total expenditure on the various activities under the Programme, and (iii) the number of visitors arranged to come to Hong Kong through the Programme, with a breakdown by the country/place from which they came and the trade to which they belonged;

(2) given that the Government, in its reply to a question from a Member of this Council on May 23, 2018, indicated that the main considerations in drawing up guest invitations under the Programme included the expertise and influence of the proposed visitors in their respective sectors or fields, as well as the Government's major policy focuses, and noting that the President of the State, in his address delivered at the Meeting Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of Macao's Return to the Motherland and the Inaugural Ceremony of the Sixth-term Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR), stated that the SAR Governments should leverage their unique advantages, reinforce their connectivity with both the Mainland and the world, and extensively develop international liaison to enhance their global influence and appeal, whether the authorities will, by making reference to the contents of aforesaid address, review and revise the considerations for guest invitations under the Programme in a timely manner; if so, of the details and the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as there are views that some industry leaders may find it inconvenient to accept the Government's sponsorship and invitation due to the political sensitivity of their identities to some extent, whether the Government has formulated measures to promote non-governmental exchanges between Hong Kong and the international community; if so, of the details and effectiveness of these measures; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the relevant policy bureaux, I give the consolidated reply to the Hon Mrs Regina Ip's question on behalf of the Government as follows:

The Sponsored Visitors Programme (SVP) aims to invite influential figures from places outside Hong Kong, such as political and business leaders, industry dignitaries, think-tank members, opinion leaders, scholars, etc., to come to Hong Kong to understand the latest developments, opportunities and advantages of the city and "bring home" our good stories. When drawing up the list of guests under the SVP, the Government takes into consideration the latest national development strategies as well as its policy priorities, including the Belt and Road Initiative, Hong Kong's development of "eight centres" as outlined in the 14th Five-Year Plan, and the emerging markets such as the Middle East and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that the Government is keen to explore. The Government specifically invites people from the relevant regions, countries and fields to visit Hong Kong under the SVP for expanding Hong Kong's circle of friends, as well as developing and deepening exchanges and co-operation with them.

The expenditure on the SVP is covered by the annual financial allocation of the Information Services Department. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no sponsored visitors were received under the SVP in the first two years of the three-year period from 2020-21 to 2022-23 while two SVP visitors came in the third year incurring an expenditure of about \$34,000. For 2023-24, there were 39 SVP visitors with an expenditure of about \$1.9 million. For the current financial year of 2024-25 (up to end December 2024), there are 43 SVP visitors with an expenditure of about \$1.1 million. These visitors come from the Mainland, Africa, America, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania involving different sectors, such as government, business, academia, arts and culture, innovation and technology (I&T), international/regional organisations and think-tanks, etc.

The above increase in the number of visitors shows that the SVP can effectively invite visitors and help expand Hong Kong's international connections. The Government will continue to make good use of this programme to promote Hong Kong's strengths to the world.

Apart from the SVP, the Government has been promoting non-governmental exchanges between Hong Kong and the Mainland as well as international communities in relevant policy areas through different channels and arrangements. Insofar as the works of the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) are concerned, we have been providing young people with various internship and exchange opportunities in the Mainland and overseas with a view to encouraging them to broaden their horizons and engage in exchange with young people from other places. As of end December 2024, approximately 25 000 and 4 800 young people have joined various internship and exchange programmes outside Hong Kong organised by the HYAB in 2024/25. In 2025/26, the HYAB will also implement enhancement measures to encourage subvented non-governmental organisations to organise more two-way exchange programmes. Besides, to expand spaces and network for youths, the HYAB will create a youth development facility in the Kai Tak Community Isolation Facility, which

includes setting up a Youth Post hostel for Mainland, overseas and local young people to stimulate creativity, develop culture, arts and sports, and engage in mutual exchange. To take forward the programme, the Government has issued the tender document on December 20, 2024, with a view to conducting an open tender exercise to select a suitable organisation for operating this new youth facility by way of short term tenancy. We anticipate the said facility will progressively commence its operation within 2025.

In addition, the 14 overseas Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government have been actively conducting external liaison and promotion work through different channels by leveraging their respective networks. The ETOs visit countries/regions under their respective purview to meet with industry organisations, business leaders and important people to brief them on the latest developments and major policy measures of Hong Kong. They actively promote Hong Kong's unique advantages under "one country, two systems", and invite business leaders and important people to visit Hong Kong to see for themselves the latest developments in the city.

Separately, in collaboration with various policy bureaux, Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) has been inviting and attracting global business leaders, industry leaders, and other important visitors to visit Hong Kong by organising regular and large-scale investment promotion events, thereby allowing them to experience first-hand the unique advantages that businesses set up in Hong Kong enjoy. Examples of large-scale investment promotion events include Wealth for Good in Hong Kong Summit, Hong Kong FinTech Week and StartmeupHK Festival. In 2024, InvestHK successfully assisted 539 overseas and Mainland companies to set up or expand businesses in Hong Kong, demonstrating that those events organised by the department could facilitate non-governmental exchanges between businesses and industries.

In respect of I&T, the Government is committed to facilitating various international I&T events to attract local and overseas industry elites and business representatives to Hong Kong for exchange. For example, in April 2024, InnoEX attracted exhibitors from 13 countries and regions. In December 2023, the Asia Pacific Information and Communications Technology Alliance (APICTA) Awards 2023 was held in Hong Kong, bringing over 600 leaders and elites of the information and communications technology industry from the other 15 member economies across the Asia Pacific region.

As for education, to achieve the objective of developing Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub, the Government will promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand to attract talents from around the world to study in Hong Kong, and support post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong to strengthen their international exchanges and connections, so as to seize every opportunity to tell the good story of Hong Kong thereby further strengthening Hong Kong's international status in the higher education sector. To support universities in further promoting Hong Kong's higher education to the world, the University Grants Committee (UGC) has allocated \$20.47 million in the 2022-25 triennium to the Heads of Universities Committee's Standing Committee on Internationalisation, which is a joint

collaboration of the eight UGC-funded universities, to participate in and organise various overseas activities, including participation and organisation of overseas events in the NAFSA Annual Conference and Expo, the European Association for International Education Annual Conference and Exhibition, and the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education Annual Conference. The UGC-funded universities will set up a Hong Kong Pavilion at these international conferences and exhibitions to recruit overseas students. To promote internationalisation, the UGC-funded universities will continue to conduct joint admission roadshows and participate in international education fairs to recruit more students from around the world to study in Hong Kong.

In respect of tourism, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has been bringing selected influential figures including media personalities, celebrities, and social media influencers from global markets to Hong Kong for immersive and first-hand experiences. The HKTB tailor-makes themed itineraries for each influencer to generate positive narratives. By harnessing their significant influence, the Government aims to amplify Hong Kong's timeless charm and attract visitors from around the world to visit Hong Kong. The HKTB also arranges familiarisation trips to enable overseas travel trade professionals to personally experience diverse tourism offerings in Hong Kong, with an aim to inspire partners to develop a wider range of tourism products. Besides, the HKTB has been actively organising various familiarisation trips for Meetings, Incentive Travels, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry representatives, corporate clients and trade association members to showcase Hong Kong's latest MICE resources and event experiences, with a view to securing large scale MICE events to be held in Hong Kong. The HKTB also brings the tourism sector to participate in major tourism exhibitions and events so as to further promote Hong Kong.

On promoting cultural exchange, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB) supports arts groups/artists from Hong Kong to stage arts and cultural activities outside Hong Kong each year, and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) in organising Hong Kong Week overseas, thereby promoting Chinese culture and Hong Kong's arts and cultural achievements, strengthening exchanges and collaboration, and enhancing people-to-people bond.

In addition, presented by the CSTB and organised by the LCSD, the Asia+ Festival is an annual event that takes place every year from September to November, featuring a variety of events including stage performances, exhibitions, an outdoor carnival, and film screenings. The Asia+ Festival 2024 offered over 100 performances and activities, attracting attendance figures of over 100 000. With a view to showcasing the vibrant arts and cultures of different countries and regions, and further strengthening Hong Kong's position as the Asian cultural metropolis, the LCSD will continue to organise the Asia+ Festival, establishing it as a brand that promotes cultural and performing arts collaborations as well as a regular exchange platform between nations.

Besides, the Cultural and Creative Industries Development Agency (CCIDA) provides funding support for and incubate cultural and creative projects with

potential for industrialisation through the CreateSmart Initiative for seven creative sectors. The CCIDA will promote cross-sectoral and cross-genre collaboration projects and leverage market resources, support the industries to participate in trade shows and exhibitions in the Mainland and overseas, and arrange delegations to the Mainland and overseas to explore business opportunities, with a view to bringing in more room for the development of Hong Kong's cultural and creative industries.

â€‹The CCIDA supports the design industries of Hong Kong to proactively perform a platform role and become a key node in the design industry chains in the Mainland and foreign countries. The CCIDA assists Hong Kong cultural and creative designers to create more cultural and creative products featuring both Chinese and Hong Kong cultural characteristics. The CCIDA also facilitates more local and non-local cultural and creative products to register on Hong Kong Trade Development Council's Asia IP Exchange Portal, so as to promote cultural intellectual property transactions and transformations, and strengthen support for local original works to exploit the Mainland and international markets.

The inaugural Hong Kong Fashion Fest was successfully held in December last year, presenting a full agenda of diverse fashion design events which included a summit and a forum, fashion shows and exhibitions showcasing the work of local and overseas designers in haute couture, workwear, evening wear and other types of clothing, showcases of the work of Asian award-winning designers and a cross-sector soiree, etc. Innovative elements and affiliate activities were also introduced into Hong Kong Fashion Fest to attract the participation of prestigious fashion brands and industry players from Hong Kong, the Mainland and overseas. The CCIDA will continue to strive to make Hong Kong Fashion Fest an annual signature event to elevate Hong Kong's influence and status in international fashion realm, and develop Hong Kong into a fashion design hub in Asia.

â€‹In recognition of Hong Kong's role as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange under the Nation's 14th Five-Year Plan, the Film Development Fund (FDF) rolled out the Hong Kong-Asian Film Collaboration Funding Scheme in 2023 to subsidise film projects co-produced by filmmakers in Asian countries which are rich in Hong Kong and Asian cultural elements, and enable Hong Kong films to go global. The FDF further expanded the original Hong Kong-Asian Film Collaboration Funding Scheme to the Hong Kong-Europe-Asian Film Collaboration Funding Scheme in 2024, which is to subsidise film projects co-produced by filmmakers from European and Asian countries to produce films featuring Hong Kong, European and Asian cultures, and enable Hong Kong films to go global and have easier access to overseas markets. The Government has also launched the Film Festival Promotion Scheme to support the promotion of Hong Kong films outside Hong Kong, with a view to facilitating the development of the Hong Kong film market. The Government will continue to lead delegations, comprising emerging directors and industry representatives from Hong Kong, to film festivals in the Mainland and overseas countries.

In conclusion, the Government has been promoting exchanges with various

stakeholders from around the world through the SVP and other measures. The relevant policy bureaux will continue deepening the exchanges and co-operation with stakeholders in accordance with the respective policy objectives.