

LCQ4: Security measures and arrangements of Police

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Fernando Cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

In recent months, the Police have placed a large number of mills barriers on certain footpaths, and fenced off government buildings with huge water barriers. Some wheelchair users and visually impaired persons have complained to me, alleging that such objects have caused inconvenience to them, including passageways leading to lifts being obstructed, tactile guide paths being broken up, and iron gates of the water-barrier enclosures being too narrow for wheelchairs to pass. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Police have formulated guidelines stipulating that impacts on the use of barrier-free access facilities by persons with disabilities (PWDs) should be avoided when the aforesaid objects are placed on footpaths; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether, while PWDs are participating in public events or travelling, channels are available for them to seek immediate assistance when their access is obstructed by the objects placed by the Police; if so, of the details; if not, whether such channels will be established; and

(3) whether the Police will immediately examine the impacts of their placing the aforesaid objects on the travelling of PWDs, and remove such objects as early as possible; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Members of the public may conduct assemblies and processions and express their views, but they must do so in a lawful, peaceful and orderly manner, and should respect other people's rights.

Regarding barrier-free facilities, the Government has formulated policies and objectives to provide a barrier-free environment for persons with disabilities (PWDs), with a view to enabling them to access premises and make use of community facilities and services on an equal basis with others, thereby helping them live independently, fully take part in various activities and integrate into the community. All government departments have Access Co-ordinators and Access Officers who co-ordinate efforts in enhancing the accessibility of barrier-free access and facilities of government

premises under their purview. All Government departments, including the Police, follow these policies and objectives. There is no need for the Police to formulate their own policies and objectives.

The Police all along handle all public order events (POEs) in a fair, just and impartial manner in accordance with the laws of Hong Kong. It has been the established policy of the Police to endeavour to strike a balance between facilitating the smooth conduct of lawful and peaceful public meetings and processions on the one hand, while on the other, minimising the impact of such events on members of the public and road users, as well as maintaining public safety and public order.

During the demonstrations over the past months, the Police remained steadfast in discharging their duties, and handled the provocations of demonstrators with tolerance and restraint. However, not only were the Police not being informed of some protests in advance in accordance with the law, people participating in the protests conducted unlawful assemblies in various places, many of which ended up in violence. The escalating and frequent violence of rioters seriously threatens the lives and properties of the public. The Police have a statutory duty to maintain public order and public safety. In situations where public order and public safety are seriously threatened, the Police must take actions decisively to curb violence and restore public peace.

A consolidated reply to the three parts of Hon Cheung's question is provided below.

Since June last year, there have been over 1 400 demonstrations, processions and public meetings in Hong Kong, many of which developed into serious breach of law and violent incidents. Every now and then during that period, rioters advocated besieging, blocking and vandalising the Central Government Offices, the Legislative Council Complex, police stations in various districts, disciplined services quarters and other buildings. These acts have seriously affected the work and life of people using the above premises, including the emergency services provided to the public by the Police.

Moreover, some rioters threw petrol bombs at police stations and government properties, set fires, attacked police vehicles and police stations, hurled objects and sprayed graffiti at the Police Headquarters, as well as vandalised government facilities, posing serious threat to public safety and public order. After risk assessment and in order to protect these buildings, the Police considered it necessary to enhance the security thereof. Apart from deploying officers to station at these buildings, a number of measures had been implemented to prevent attacks and damage, including setting up water barriers.

When the Police take relevant security measures, they will communicate with the managers and responsible persons of the property management of the premises concerned. This is to ensure the effective implementation of the security measures on the one hand, and minimise the impact on people using

these premises and road users, including PWDs, on the other. When security measures are put into effect, the Police will maintain contact with the responsible persons of the property management concerned for reviewing the security measures and arrangements from time to time.

The Police have contacted different stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations offering support to PWDs, and explained to them the reasons for implementing security measures by the Police. Meanwhile, the Police have also explained to them the Government's barrier-free policy. For access to Government venues or use of relevant facilities therein, PWDs may directly seek help from the Access Officer responsible for the accessibility issues of the relevant Government venues if necessary.

I need to point out that the use of water barriers and the implementation of additional security measures in these Government buildings were necessary counter-measures taken in response to the frequent violence and attack incidents that took place in some Government premises which provided services to the public and police stations over the past few months. If members of the public conduct POEs in a peaceful, lawful and orderly manner, and do not commit serious violent acts of vandalism and attacks such as those we saw on television, there would be no need for the Police to implement the above security measures.

I hope the public would address the serious damage and undesirable impacts of the rioters' violence on our society. Since June last year, a large number of shops, and even courts including the Court of Final Appeal, the High Court and Magistrates' Courts have been vandalised. About 740 sets of traffic lights across the city have been intentionally vandalised more than 1 600 times, which include cutting of wires, defacing or even burning down. Besides, as at March 11, 2020, the barrier-free facilities, including escalators and lifts, of the MTR Corporation Limited have been vandalised about 120 times and over 80 times respectively. These violent acts of vandalism of the rioters have severely affected the daily lives and access of people from all walks of life, including PWDs, causing inconvenience or even danger to all commuters. If Members care about the accessibility of PWDs, they should care about the facilities for PWDs, and should vehemently condemn the violent acts of rioters that destroyed the facilities for PWDs. The public should firmly reject the violence of rioters. Moreover, Members must not acquiesce to or glorify violent acts of the rioters, and not become accomplices in destroying the tranquility of our society.

Thank you, President.