

Opening remarks by CE at media session

Following are the opening remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session this morning (June 10):

Chief Executive: Let me say a few words in English. First of all, I want to say that the march yesterday on the Government's amendments to two pieces of ordinance has been conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly manner, and I think this fully reflects the degree of civilisation in Hong Kong society and reaffirms that the rights and freedoms of individuals, of journalists, etc, are fully protected and safeguarded under the Basic Law. In a way I hope this incident also helps to refute any worries and allegations that these rights and freedoms have been eroded in recent years. I think they clearly demonstrate that these rights and freedoms are as robust as ever.

Of course, we were very sad to watch the TV after midnight that there was some violence undertaken by a few hundred protesters, including attacking the Police, obstructing the roads, etc. As a result, several police colleagues and at least one reporter and maybe some other people have been hurt. I want to extend to them my warmest sympathy and hope that they will recover as soon as possible. The Police, as mentioned by the Commissioner of Police earlier this morning, are taking very serious actions against those breaches of the law, because Hong Kong is a very lawful society. While we respect and uphold the freedoms of expression, we also expect every citizen to obey the law.

Coming back to the substance of the march and the protest, I fully understand that during the march many of the participants have expressed worries and concerns and anxiety about the Government's attempt to amend the legislation. I have also heard from the political parties who have issued statements after the march that while reaffirming their support for the Government's action, they also have put forward some constructive suggestions. I'm responding in the following four areas of work.

One is we realise that our communication and explanation work has to continue, whether throughout the Legislative Council scrutiny process or even after the enactment of the bill, because this is a very important piece of legislation that will help to uphold justice and also ensure that Hong Kong will fulfil her international obligation in terms of cross-boundary and transnational crimes. The explanation will focus on the additional safeguards that we have introduced, especially on May 30 by the Secretary for Security. Those six measures will provide some of the very reassuring human rights safeguards that we have heard some people, especially from the legal sector, who have put those proposals to us in the earlier part of the consultation. Our experience is as long as there is a chance for us to interact and to explain and answer questions directly face to face, normally it will have a very positive effect on the other stakeholders to improve or enhance their understanding of what we are doing.

The second area of work that we will do is, coming back to the additional human rights safeguards that we have announced on May 30, I heard that there was some worry that they were just statements made by a government official, and they are not particularly reassuring. I'm telling you here that in this area of work, we will make sure that all these additional safeguards, and there is a long list of those additional safeguards, which resemble very closely the international standards and the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) minimum guarantees, they will have a legal binding effect on the Government because we will put them into a very solemn policy statement to be delivered by the Secretary for Security when the bill resumes its second reading in the Legislative Council. If one cares to go into the bill itself, there is a very specific provision that says that as long as we ask for these safeguards from the requesting party and put them into some sort of agreement, then they will, of course, restrict or confine the executive's ability in the surrender of fugitive offenders. In short, these human rights safeguards have binding effect, and we will only surrender a fugitive requested by a requesting party when these guarantees are being fully met.

The third area of work is in response to a suggestion from some political parties late last night, that is, if the bill were passed, those political parties suggested that the Government should provide regular reports to the Legislative Council about the implementation of this sort of case-by-case surrender arrangement, in terms of the jurisdictions involved, the nature of the cases and whether the human rights safeguards and procedural safeguards that we have been talking about are being fully implemented.

I have to stress again that we said at the very beginning of this exercise that this special surrender arrangement, that is, a case-based surrender arrangement, is a supplementary arrangement. It's a sort of stop-gap arrangement because we do have a very serious gap and deficiency in our justice system. The long-term arrangement, or the long-term goal, is still to enter into long-term agreement on the surrender of fugitive offenders with as many jurisdictions as possible. We now have 20 such agreements. We should increase these bilateral agreements as far as possible, so I will accord priority to this area of work and will immediately enhance the staff resources in the Security Bureau and the Department of Justice to enable them to catch up on the work and to start the negotiations on these long-term agreements, including negotiations with the Mainland of China, Taiwan and Macao.

Finally, I want to say to every citizen in Hong Kong who has expressed a view on these amendments, whether you are agreeing or not agreeing with us, whether you are supporting the work that we are doing or objecting to the work that we are doing, I want to thank every one of you, because the concern of every citizen about the work that the Government is doing, and this scrutiny of our work, is an important factor to enhancing good governance in Hong Kong. Thank you very much.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)