

Opening remarks by SCMA at media session on EAC's report on REO's loss of Register of Electors (with video)

Following are the opening remarks made by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, at a media session today (July 24) at the Central Government Offices on the Electoral Affairs Commission's (EAC) independent investigation report on the Registration and Electoral Office's (REO) loss of a Register of Electors:

The HKSAR Government takes the loss of a Register of Electors relating to the 2016 Legislative Council (LegCo) General Election by the REO very seriously. After the incident, we immediately instructed the REO to undertake a series of follow-up actions, and provided the EAC with independent administrative support to conduct a full investigation so as to identify the problems and deficiencies in the electoral arrangements and REO's management, and make recommendations for improvement. The EAC just held a press conference this afternoon to release the report. I would like to say a few words on the Government's follow-up actions.

Public elections in Hong Kong have always been conducted in an open, fair and honest manner. This important principle should be upheld at all times. The HKSAR Government considers the loss of the Register unacceptable, and we thank the EAC for conducting a comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation and putting forth a series of improvement measures. We fully accept the EAC's recommendations, and have instructed the REO to implement the improvement measures as a matter of priority to avoid similar incidents from happening again.

The EAC learnt that the incident was related to the handling of electoral materials after the completion of the counting of votes. It has identified the REO's shortcomings in various aspects and proposed over 20 improvement measures in six major areas. Most of the recommendations on improving the packaging, transportation, collection and handling of materials, as well as strengthening staff training and internal communication could be implemented before the District Council Ordinary Election to be held in November this year.

We will support the REO in launching the improvement measures in a number of aspects:

(1) The REO will proactively introduce technologies in public elections, such as using IT in the process of handling and storing electoral materials to make recording and tracking more effective.

(2) On storage and accommodation, we have requested the Government Property Agency (GPA) to provide sufficient storage space to meet the REO's demand in

the upcoming elections, and in the longer term, to house the REO's store facilities under one roof for better store management of electoral materials. We have also invited the GPA to identify one single office accommodation for the REO.

(3) Also, we will work with the relevant policy bureaux to review the organisational structure and manpower requirements of the REO so that it will have the required manpower and resources to implement the EAC's proposals.

After it was confirmed that the Register of Electors was lost in early April, the former Chief Electoral Officer reported to me that his subordinates had never reported the incident to him. He also made a public statement stating the same. However, the investigation results revealed that his statement made at that time did not match with the facts. The former Chief Electoral Officer has been formally transferred out of the department. On whether individual REO staff should be held responsible for the incident, this will be handled by the Civil Service Bureau in accordance with the established disciplinary procedures.

I feel regretful and am disappointed about the incident. Once again I extend my apology to members of the public. I trust that the REO has learnt from the incident and will implement the improvement measures fully to forestall similar incidents from happening again. I and my colleagues in the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau will provide all the necessary assistance and support to the REO.