

Opening remarks by SCMA on Hong Kong people in Hubei

The Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip; the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; and the Secretary for Food and Health, Prof Sophia Chan, met the media today (February 24). Following is a translation of the opening remarks made by Mr Nip:

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government attaches great importance to the situation of the Hong Kong people in Hubei Province and fully understands their wish to return to Hong Kong as soon as possible. Over the past period of time, the HKSAR Government has been actively discussing with the relevant government departments and public health experts to draw up a feasible and safe plan to bring back the Hong Kong people currently stranded in Hubei Province, which will at the same time cause minimal public health risk in Hong Kong. We have also liaised with the relevant Mainland authorities with the aim to bring back, in batches and as soon as possible, Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei, especially groups of special needs.

The HKSAR Government announces that chartered flights will be arranged to bring back Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei in batches. This is a joint operation by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, the Security Bureau, the Food and Health Bureau and relevant departments such as the Immigration Department, the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority. The Director of Immigration will also take part in the operation. We need to discuss and finalise the detailed arrangements with the Hubei Provincial Government before the operation could be implemented.

Basically, the first batch of chartered flights will assist Hong Kong residents stranded in Wuhan to return home. Accordingly to the information available to us, about 450 Hong Kong people seeking assistance are in Wuhan. Some Hong Kong people in other parts of Hubei Province may have some more urgent needs, such as pregnant women, those who suffer from serious illness and are urgently in need of surgery or other medical treatments in Hong Kong, or secondary school graduates who need to sit for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination in Hong Kong. The HKSAR Government will discuss with the Hubei Provincial Government and relevant local departments with an aim to arranging them to take the first batch of chartered flights to Hong Kong. We will also seek medical advice on whether they are fit for travel.

As for Hong Kong residents who are in other cities in Hubei, we will make arrangements in stages to bring them back to Hong Kong. Details of the operation have to be further discussed with the Hubei Provincial Government.

All Hong Kong people who take the chartered flights must be HKID card holders. In order to reduce the risk of cross-infection during the journey,

Hong Kong residents who develop fever, respiratory tract symptoms or other signs of infectious diseases will not be suitable to board the flight. Those who suffer from chronic illnesses should also assess their health conditions and decide whether they are fit for travel. Health screening will be conducted for each passenger before boarding. Those who develop fever, abnormal vital signs, respiratory tract symptoms or other signs of infectious diseases will not be allowed to board the plane.

Taking into consideration the potential risk on public health, the people concerned will be arranged to stay in quarantine centres for 14 days upon their arrival in Hong Kong.

The HKSAR Government is actively communicating with the Hubei Provincial Government and the relevant local government departments with a view to bringing back the Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei in batches and in an orderly manner. Over the past weeks, we have received more than 2 700 people requesting for assistance or filing their cases. I would like to remind Hong Kong people who are currently in different parts of Hubei (including Wuhan) and who have contacted the Economic and Trade Office in Wuhan (Wuhan ETO) or the 1868 hotline that there is no need to call the (Wuhan ETO) or the 1868 hotline, or to send emails to enquire about the relevant arrangements. The Government will strive to finalise the detailed arrangements of the operation with the Hubei Provincial Government as soon as possible and will make further announcements when available.

Last but not least, we would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the care and concern expressed by the Central Government and the assistance rendered by the Hubei Provincial Government. I would also like to express my gratitude to our Wuhan ETO colleagues for their commitment to work and for trying their very best in rendering suitable and practicable assistance to Hong Kong residents stranded in Hubei, including attending to their medical needs. Wuhan ETO will continue to strengthen communication with Hong Kong residents in Hubei, including groups of Hong Kong people with special needs, to provide them with practicable assistance and support.