

Remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (with video)

Following are the remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (January 21):

Reporter: Just touching on Trump's inauguration, many people, including your own Financial Secretary, have warned of the risks of the second Trump presidency on the economy. So I'm just wondering if you can elaborate on what you expect the impacts to be on Hong Kong and what steps you're taking to insulate the city's economy from any possible actions taken against it. And with regards to the scam compounds in Southeast Asia, do you have a timeline, or when do you expect the remaining victims to be returned to the city? Thank you.

Chief Executive: With the new president in office, this is a good start for China-US relations to be pushed to make greater success and greater progress from this new starting point. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government always strengthens ties and exchanges with different countries, including the US, so we will continue to promote ties and exchanges between the two peoples. Of course, mutual respect, mutual understanding and common will are important. There are a lot of benefits for good relations between China and the US, and also between Hong Kong and the US. We believe in free and open trade, and the US has been enjoying a lot of benefits in the trade relations between Hong Kong and the US. There is a trade surplus amounting to US\$270 billion over the past 10 years. There are some 1 400 US companies in Hong Kong, and that is an increase of 9 per cent from the previous year. There are a lot of benefits in promoting good relations between Hong Kong and the US, and Hong Kong has always tried to promote economic co-operation and collaboration. That is why I have been expanding regional co-operation with the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the Middle East and also new partners, particularly Belt and Road countries.

I think there are a lot of commonalities and common interests between Hong Kong and the US, and with the new president in office, I hope to see that there will be good efforts to promote positive relations, because co-operation and collaboration will only create overall good for the people of Hong Kong and the people of the US. Hong Kong people and US citizens have always been friends in a lot of areas, and we will continue to work hard in that regard, but of course, we will always prepare for the worst, and we will ensure that the rights of our people and companies will be protected.

As regards the detention of Hong Kong people in some Southeast Asian countries after they have been deceived to go to the region, we have been strengthening efforts on all fronts. Our aim, of course, is to rescue them as soon as possible, so that they can all come back to Hong Kong safely. Thanks to the efforts of the Security Bureau, in the period, 18 Hong Kong citizens have been rescued, and there are still now 10 Hong Kong citizens being

detained in Southeast Asian countries. Our efforts focus on four areas. First is full and thorough investigation, together with enforcement. Second, enhanced co-operation with our partners. There are a lot of players in the whole fight against these crimes, including the law enforcement agencies in the relevant countries. There are good networks already; the respective countries have already heightened their attention and escalated the government participation in our whole fight. We will continue to strengthen co-operation in this area, passing intelligence across the players. The third thing we will do is to ensure that we will have the right Outbound Travel Alerts for Hong Kong citizens. We have recently raised the travel alert for (the southeastern regions of) Myanmar to red, and also we have regularly added new information on the Security Bureau's webpage regarding those areas where these crimes are serious and the new modus operandi, in order to heighten citizens' awareness of where the potential risks are. The fourth area is to continue to strengthen publicity and education to alert innocent Hong Kong people to the seriousness of these crimes, and also to ensure that they get updated information. I thank the media and everybody who are involved for this education and publicity campaign to continue. I thank for their efforts and hope they will continue to strengthen efforts in this regard.

Reporter: Are you worried about more Trump sanctions on Hong Kong officials?

Chief Executive: We have finished the session, but I still want to continue with this, because I hope that there will be a good starting point for good relations between Hong Kong and the US to progress. Hong Kong people believe in a lot of principles, and all these principles are on righteousness, justice and doing the best for the overall good of Hong Kong. Any political interference, any inappropriate action against Hong Kong will not work, particularly as we believe what we do is for the overall good of Hong Kong. If there is any attempt to interfere with trials in Hong Kong, or officials or people who are involved in administering justice, it won't work, and we are doing it exactly in the same way in protecting our national security, as other citizens in their own countries. We are right in our action and decisions, and we uphold justice in the whole process. Thank you.

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