

S for S speaks on arranging Hong Kong residents under quarantine on board Diamond Princess cruise back to Hong Kong

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, at a media session at the Hong Kong International Airport this afternoon (February 17):

Reporter: Can you give your statement in English please?

Secretary for Security: We care for and are concerned with the well-being of the Hong Kong residents who are now kept on the Diamond Princess cruise, so we are very serious about the operation to evacuate those who are now on board the ship. Once they have been cleared by the Japanese authorities in regard to the blood test, they will be released on the 19th (of February), which is Wednesday. We have made our demands to Japan and we will reiterate our demands and further request for these Hong Kong people that once they are allowed to disembark, then they should be transported immediately to the airport, so that we will arrange them to get on board our chartered flight.

We have arranged two chartered flights ready to take them to leave Japan on the 19th (of February), so that they can come back to Hong Kong on the 20th (of February). After their arrival at Hong Kong, they will be sent to quarantine camps for 14 days' quarantine. This is done in accordance with the advice of the experts and according to the analysis about public health requirements. I advise all Hong Kong residents to take these chartered flights, so that they will all come back together to go through the procedures for their own health reason and for the protection of other people. It is important for them to know that if they do not take our chartered flight on this occasion, there will likely be a lot of difficulties for them to get back to Hong Kong because they have been on board this cruise, and it is a very open knowledge that people on this cruise will have to go through this quarantine procedure, so they will be encountering all sort of difficulties including hotels and flights.

The second thing is when they come back to Hong Kong, they are very likely that they will go through the same procedure. Our port health officers will examine each and every one of them. They are known on our immigration list, so that they will be questioned once they arrive at Hong Kong. We have arranged two chartered flights, each has over 400 seats, so there will be very sufficient space for the Hong Kong people to get on our flights. Of course there are special seating arrangements to ensure that it will conform with the health safety standard. We know that there will likely be about 350 Hong Kong people including 260 Hong Kong permanent residents and another 90 who may be holding foreign passports. We also learn that there are five Macao citizens on board the cruise, so if they want to join our flight, then we

will entertain them, so that when they arrive in Hong Kong, they will be dealt with according to the wish, probably to be conveyed back to Macao.

Today we sent off the first forward action team comprising about 30 people belonging to the Security Bureau, the Immigration Department and the Department of Health. Once they arrive, they will be in touch with the Chinese embassy, who will be helping us to make our demands and also make the arrangements for the Hong Kong people to leave (for) Hong Kong. This operation has received the support of the Central Government, the foreign office, the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in Hong Kong and also the Chinese embassy. A lot of places and governments will be asking the Japanese authorities for different arrangements, so it is important that we go early and make our requirements loud and clear, so that the arrangements can be made as quickly as possible.

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