

Speech by CE at 2020 Colloquium on International Law (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the 2020 Colloquium on International Law today (December 3):

Commissioner Xie (Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr Xie Feng), Dr Neoh (Chairman of the Asian Academy of International Law, Dr Anthony Neoh), Professor Huang (President of the Chinese Society of International Law, Professor Huang Jin), ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to speak to you once again at the annual Colloquium on International Law. Allow me to first thank the Asian Academy of International Law and the Chinese Society of International Law for organising this year's Colloquium, despite the distressing pandemic times we live in.

Time flies fast! This is already the fourth time in a row that I have had the pleasure of speaking before you. I vividly remember the day I addressed your inaugural Colloquium in July 2017. I spoke then about two Hong Kong advantages – the "One Country, Two Systems" principle and the rule of law – as central to our success as an economy and a community. I was, at the time, just seven days on the job as Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR.

Three years and some five months later, and having guided Hong Kong through perhaps the most turbulent period since the Reunification in 1997, I wish to say that I have now a much deeper understanding of this great vision of "One Country, Two Systems" put forward by Mr Deng Xiaoping, a much stronger attachment to the rule of law, and a much greater conviction that acting in accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the Basic Law of the Hong Kong SAR is the only way to ensure Hong Kong's continued prosperity and stability. This year is the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law; its guiding philosophy and the 160 articles remain pivotal to Hong Kong's success. But we have to improve the relevant institutions and mechanisms for implementing the Basic Law accurately and comprehensively. This is in fact one of the themes in the 2020 Policy Address that I delivered a week ago.

For the time being, let's focus on the theme of this year's Colloquium, "Challenging an Interdependent World – Sanctions". We live today in a world of super-connectivity, in communications, travel, business, the business of government and much else. In this global village, interdependence is a natural consequence. The COVID-19 pandemic has surely demonstrated this. In fighting the pandemic, economies have to rely on each other for the supply of personal protective equipment, medicine, vaccines in the future, etc, as well

as for the sharing of intelligence and experience. We need all economies to be able to effectively control the pandemic, before we can contemplate the full resumption of cross-boundary travels. In the longer term, global interdependence is also essential to economic recovery, sustainable growth and continuing progress.

The Belt and Road Initiative, which brings together East and West along the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, is built on interdependence, created for that very reason: to bring economies and peoples together for the benefit of all. Since the Belt and Road Initiative was raised by President Xi Jinping in 2013, it has been well received by the international community and is progressing well. So far, China has already signed over 200 co-operation documents with 138 countries and 31 international organisations.

The launch of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) last month is another laudable example of international co-operation. It connects the 10 nations of ASEAN, together with Mainland China, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea, in a regional free trade agreement on a vast scale. Collectively, this Partnership accounts for 30 per cent of global GDP and nearly 30 per cent of the world's population, making it the planet's largest trade bloc. The Partnership is a milestone in economic integration, and is also a promising catalyst for post-pandemic recovery. My Government has expressed keen interest in joining the Partnership, and we look forward to beginning a dialogue on accession at the earliest opportunity.

If interdependency can inspire co-operation, it can also incite coercion in an effort to extract trade or foreign policy or political goals. This afternoon's panel discussions will no doubt yield insights into the overuse, or misuse, of sanctions as a blunt instrument, a clear impediment to global collaboration and development.

On this topic, I have a clear and compelling interest. It is my passionate belief that nations and economies should strive for co-operation and collaboration. The imposition of sanctions can only stifle relations between countries and peoples, and undermine growth and economic development. Regrettably, earlier this year, the United States has imposed so called "sanctions" against a number of officials of the Central Government and the Hong Kong SAR Government, myself included. Worse still, the United States has also imposed unfair origin marking rules on Hong Kong products, and unilaterally suspended or terminated bilateral agreements signed between us, on legal co-operation and shipping matters. Such unilateral actions, under the pretext of human rights, democracy and autonomy, seriously undermine Hong Kong's interests. They constitute blatant interference in the internal affairs of our nation, and are clear breaches of international laws and basic norms governing international relations.

The United States' claim that their action was in response to the enactment of our National Security Law is a very lame excuse that could hardly stand up to challenge. The National Security Law was enacted so that the Hong Kong SAR could safeguard national security. Thanks to the National

Security Law, law and order has been restored to society, and our people can continue to enjoy their basic rights and freedoms in accordance with the law. These are facts that no one can deny. So, regardless of the unfair criticisms and the so called "sanctions" imposed by the United States and any other foreign countries, my Government will continue to discharge our duty to safeguard national security in accordance with the law. And by safeguarding national security, it will provide a solid basis for the continued success of "One Country, Two Systems", and the long-term prosperity of Hong Kong.

As to Hong Kong's another important advantage that I mentioned in 2017, and that is the rule of law, the opening of our Legal Hub and the launch of Vision 2030 last month clearly underline our commitment to promoting and reinforcing the rule of law. Hong Kong's Legal Hub, located in the historic former Central Government Offices and the French Mission Building, where we are now standing, brings together more than 20 local, regional and international law-related organisations. In doing so, it will showcase Hong Kong's myriad strengths as a legal hub for deal-making and dispute-resolution, with professional services built on neutrality, international expertise and a world of experience. As for the Vision 2030 launched by the Department of Justice, it is a 10-year initiative to promote better understanding of the rule of law through public education, research and wide-ranging collaboration, and ultimately to contribute to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By promoting better understanding, the foundation of the rule of law will be stronger than ever in Hong Kong.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a very rewarding Colloquium and a New Year blessed with the best of health and bountiful promise, in work as in life. Thank you very much.

