

Speech by CE at HKU-Pasteur Research Pole 20th Anniversary Opening Symposium (English only) (with photo/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole 20th Anniversary Opening Symposium today (October 21):

Consul General Giorgini (Consul General of France in Hong Kong and Macau, Mr Alexandre Giorgini), Professor Stewart Cole (President of Institut Pasteur), who's online, Professor Ngan (Acting Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), Professor Alfonso Ngan), Professor Bruzzone (Co-Director of the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole, Professor Roberto Bruzzone), Professor Poon (Co-Director of the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole, Professor Leo Poon), Professor Fukuda (Director of the School of Public Health of HKU, Professor Keiji Fukuda), ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to join you in celebration of the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole's 20th anniversary.

The remarkable success of the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole over the past 20 years speaks of the strong and long-standing co-operation between Hong Kong and France. It reflects, too, the trust that exists between our respective scientific and academic communities. And, no less important, it signifies our mutual resolve to fight infectious diseases through biological research and teaching at the very highest level. For that, we thank the University of Hong Kong and the Pasteur Institute.

A pillar of research and teaching in Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong is amongst the world's leaders. This year's Times Higher Education rankings places the University 28th in the world in medical research, and fourth in Asia in all fields of research. As for the Pasteur Institute, it has been a global leader in infectious diseases, microbiology and immunology for well over a century. It is therefore no surprise that when these two institutions join their hands to work together, it will bring success as in the case of the Research Pole.

The Research Pole collaboration began in 2000 with a dozen employees. It is now a burgeoning research alliance embracing some 50 research professionals from Hong Kong, France and all over the world. It is fully integrated into the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong and offers three major international courses a year through its teaching programme. That, I'm pleased to say, does a splendid job of showcasing the quality of Hong Kong science and education to the many scientists and students involved in the teaching programme.

As for research, over the past 20 years, the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole has advanced understanding of viral infectious diseases. That includes, in particular, respiratory viruses such as influenza and the coronaviruses, as well as mosquito-borne viruses, including dengue and Zika. It has developed diagnostic tests for avian and pandemic influenza.

As the world continues to fight COVID-19, the work of the Research Pole becomes even more significant. Responding to the pandemic, the Research Pole has produced a sensitive and rapid test to detect antibodies against the virus that causes COVID-19, enhancing the development of second-generation diagnostic tests for the disease. Indeed, this antibody test is now being used in research studies to estimate population immunity. I applaud the Research Pole's fast and effective work in this area.

With the current term of the HKSAR Government making determined strides in developing innovation and technology, I am delighted that the University of Hong Kong and the Institut Pasteur have joined hands again in establishing a new centre for immunology and infection in concert with the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation. I had the pleasure of witnessing the signing of the memorandum of understanding for the establishment of the centre in 2018 in Paris, and am even more pleased to see the project coming to fruition. I understand the new venture will target vaccine development and therapeutic strategies.

The establishment of this Centre is in line with the Government's commitment to supporting research on a wide spectrum of health issues with a view to safeguarding public health and curing diseases. By combining the power of the academia and industry, the tripartite partnership will create an open platform for multi-sectoral collaboration and facilitate the translation of biomedical innovations into commercial value and industrial impact. It will also contribute to Hong Kong's transformation into an international innovation and technology hub, which is key to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Our commitment to medical research is also clearly evident in the Government's efforts to combat COVID-19. To date, we have already allocated nearly US\$35 million under the Health and Medical Research Fund of the Food and Health Bureau in support of some 50 COVID-19 research studies. They range from virus transmission and infection, to detection and surveillance, prevention strategies and the development of treatments and therapies.

Then there's the Innovation and Technology Fund under the Innovation and Technology Bureau, which is supporting nearly 60 trial projects focused on detection, diagnosis and surveillance of the COVID-19 virus. These vary from anti-viral coatings in public transport and elderly care centres to disinfection robots, body temperature detection systems and other projects at the trial stage.

Both funds give priority to projects that can be completed fast and efficiently. We want to be able to get them applied in the community, to

protect the health of the people, and to play our part in the global fight against the pandemic.

Co-operation for the greater good, epitomised by Louis Pasteur, has never been more greatly felt, or even needed. Thankfully, that support has been clear and compelling, from the businesses and the people of Hong Kong to the Government. It is also abundantly visible in our international partnerships such as the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole. For two decades, the Research Pole has made a palpable contribution to our economies and to our peoples, to our progress in science, research and education. I have no doubt that people will gather together, in 10 and 20 years from now, to celebrate again and again the Research Pole's singular efforts for the greater good.

My congratulations, once again, to the HKU-Pasteur Research Pole on its milestone 20th anniversary. I wish you all a rewarding symposium, and very good health. Thank you very much.

