

Speech by CE at Hong Kong 2022 International Urban Forestry Conference (English only) (with photo/video)

â€‹Following is the video speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Hong Kong 2022 International Urban Forestry Conference today (March 2):

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to the opening of the Hong Kong International Urban Forestry Conference.

Two years ago, I addressed the inaugural International Urban Forestry Conference and was impressed by the valuable experiences and insights on urban forestry topics shared by the renowned guest speakers from different parts of the world. Riding on its success, the Development Bureau has organised this second edition. More than 1 700 professionals from over 30 countries have registered for it, ranging from arborists and horticulturists to urban planners, forest and country park officials, environmental leaders, landscape architects, academics and more.

Over two full days, you will hear from over 20 notable speakers from around the world under the theme "Well-being: Our Urban Forestâ€™Our Community". They will give you the latest developments, insights and success stories covering four broad areas and sessions: well-being cities, urban forestry in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, landscape design for health and well-being, and the healthy urban forest. For one thing, it is a deserved spotlight, one that reflects the troubled epidemic era we live in. Never before have the benefits of the environment, and well-being, been more essential, more in demand. The urban forest provides much more than fresh air, exercise and quiet time. It also offers therapeutic and restorative value at community and personal levels. In just a few moments, a World Health Organization specialist in urban health will address this topic and its broad and consequential implications for us all.

For the next few minutes, may I take you all through the urban forestry in Hong Kong, one of the world's most compact and densely populated cities. Hong Kong's built-up space is concentrated in only about 25 per cent of our land area. The joy of this teeming city is that 40 per cent of its space is given over to country parks blessed with dense and diversified forestry and vegetation. Greening and landscaping have been widely incorporated in the planning of our new development areas. Through the planning strategy "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030", my Government is committed to ensuring that Hong Kong remains a liveable,

competitive and sustainable city – Asia's World City. I am confident that by adopting effective spatial-planning strategies and providing more quality space, our social, environmental and economic aspirations will be achieved. It helps that Hong Kong is well-endowed with green space and water resources.

Among the goals of our 2030+ strategy is developing our city in close concert with nature. To this end, we are revitalising Tai Wai Nullah, creating the first drainage channel to incorporate public access in Hong Kong. A long stretch of the channel will allow the public to enjoy green space as well as water-friendly activities. Tomorrow morning, Thomas Wong, Chief Engineer in our Drainage Services Department, will discuss the project, followed by a panel discussion on the subject.

The Tung Chung New Town Extension will also balance the needs of development and conservation. The large-scale, land-and-housing development is scheduled to welcome its initial population intake in 2024. The project will connect nature and the new community through the innovative use of green corridors. These will link up with wildlife habitats in the neighboring countryside.

The Northern Metropolis, announced in my 2021 Policy Address last year, will take our nature-development ambitions to another level entirely. The planned city, embracing 300 square kilometres of land in Hong Kong's far-northern reaches, will ultimately house a population of 2.5 million. Reflecting our policy goals of developing Hong Kong into a liveable city, the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy will work to create a better home-job balance for those who settle in the new city. It will provide higher per-capita-space standards for accommodation, as well as open leisure space close to the surrounding environment.

The Northern Metropolis is rich in hilly terrain, rivers, wetlands, fish ponds and other natural resources. It will take full advantage of nature's bounty, featuring abundant green space in a variety of areas. Through concerted landscape design, the communities throughout the Northern Metropolis will be just steps away from nature. Looking beyond, the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area lie just across our boundary, making the Northern Metropolis a natural connection and co-operation point with the Greater Bay Area.

Two years ago, the Development Bureau, the organiser of this conference, joined the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Ecology and Landscape Alliance. I am pleased to note that the Alliance is working to realise sustainable development throughout the Greater Bay Area, creating a quality living circle for living, working and travelling in the region. There is much room for co-operation among the cities of the Greater Bay Area, and I know we all look forward to building a healthy and sustainable urban forest together.

Later this morning, we will hear from Dr Wendy Chen, Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Hong Kong, and her Greater Bay Area colleagues involved in a nature-based research project dedicated to the re-greening of urban riverscape in Guangdong. It is part of

the Clearing House, a series of EU-funded projects bringing together partners from Europe and China. Their primary goal is to investigate the role of urban forests in addressing the sustainable-development challenges of cities. Session two this afternoon will focus entirely on urban forestry in the Greater Bay Area.

Our focus here in Hong Kong continues to be on developing arboriculture and horticulture talent and expanding research and development initiatives to ensure sustainable growth and effective management of our urban forest. Two years ago, we set up the US\$26 million Urban Forestry Support Fund to subsidise the Study Sponsorship Scheme and Trainee Programme. The two offerings help fund individuals undertaking tree-management studies; and also provide on-the-job training, and a monthly allowance, for arboriculture and tree-management course graduates. To date, some 430 students have been approved under the study scheme, while close to 100 graduates are now engaged as trainees in private companies, as well as government departments. I am confident that these, and other initiatives, will help Hong Kong build an adequate and quality workforce to support our tree management work.

The Development Bureau is also driving a variety of R&D projects. Last August, they launched a three-year study to collect and analyse tree-movement data from 8 000 urban trees installed with tilt sensors. This is a pioneering project in identifying trees at risk of collapse. In addition, they have begun installing some 200 000 QR-code labels on trees in the urban area to make it easier for the public to report problematic trees. The project is expected to be finished in April.

Speaking of dates, on July 1 we mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. I am delighted to say that this two-day international conference is among the events chosen to celebrate the milestone occasion. For its exemplary efforts in difficult circumstances, allow me to thank the overall conference organiser, the Development Bureau, and four organisations for their wide-ranging support and advice, namely the Construction Industry Council, the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects, the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong, and the University of Hong Kong. Adding to the list are nearly 30 supporting organisations which have lent their experience, expertise and connections to put together this conference to inspire urban forest developments locally and abroad.

My thanks, as well, to the Hong Kong musician and a cappella group that opened the conference. If you are wondering, the musician and composer, Lau Chun-ho, played a handpan, bird-whistle, rainstick and Chinese flute. The settling performance, which took place in two of our urban parks, resonated with our conference theme on well-being and the essential interaction of people and communities and the environment.

I am sure that you all share the love for Hong Kong's nature and environment, but I must ask you to refrain from going out unnecessarily at the moment. Hong Kong is now in a critical situation amidst the unprecedented fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic, and it is important for each and every

one of you to stay vigilant and support the Government's anti-epidemic efforts. With the staunch support by the Central Government and the joint efforts of different sectors of our community, we have every confidence that we can ride out the fifth wave of the epidemic to resume normal lives.

I wish you all a rewarding conference, and a year full of good health and abounding well-being in, and beyond, your urban forests. Thank you.

