

Speech by CE at Hong Kong Institution of Engineers Annual Grand Ceremony cum Award Presentation (English only) (with photo/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (HKIE) Annual Grand Ceremony cum Award Presentation today (June 4):

Professor Yuen (President of the HKIE, Professor Yuen Pak-leung), Deputy Commissioner Yang (Deputy Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr Yang Yirui), Mr Fan (Chairman of the Hospital Authority, Mr Henry Fan), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. I am delighted to be here with you, in person, for the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers Grand Ceremony and Award Presentation. I also attended in person the Quality Building Award 2020 Presentation Ceremony, of which the Institute is one of the organisers, just two days ago. I am glad that these events are filling up my schedule again, for it shows that we are getting back to normality. As a former Secretary for Development and an honorary fellow of HKIE, it is always a pleasure to have the opportunity to meet with old friends, as well as to give recognition to the outstanding engineers and construction professionals.

I last attended a similar event of HKIE in 2018. Since then, Hong Kong has encountered unprecedented challenges. During the darkest hours of political chaos and street violence, Hong Kong's continued prosperity and stability was at risk. While engineers have been spending their life in building Hong Kong, I am sure many of you then were shocked and saddened by the destruction to the railway stations and public infrastructure that you have helped to build. Thanks to the Central Authorities in enacting the National Security Law which was promulgated for implementation in Hong Kong on June 30 last year, law and order have been quickly restored.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic which has hit the world, and is still haunting many countries and regions, including those in our neighbourhood. For over 17 months, Hong Kong and the world have been devastated by COVID-19. Our economy, and most of our sectors, from aviation and tourism to food and beverage, retailing and construction, have all been hard hit. Our community, the daily lives of all of us, have been severely disrupted.

In such difficult times, it is essential that we work together. The construction sector, in its usual solidarity and pragmatism, has played an important role in our fight against COVID-19 in terms of building new quarantine facilities, improving air ventilation in certain prescribed

premises, identifying innovation and technology solutions and keeping our construction sites safe through promoting regular testing and more recently, vaccination of staff under the Government Vaccination Programme. And HKIE, with its 33 000 engineering professionals, are certainly behind much of those efforts and achievements.

This fight against the epidemic has been a long, protracted, sometimes frustrated, but sometimes gratifying experience. My Government is determined to do all in its power to move our economy and our community past this pandemic as fast as we could. To date, we have coped with four waves without resorting to lockdown or curfew; we have not turned away a single infected patient from hospital isolation and treatment; thousands of men and women have been at the frontline caring for the infected, serving in hospitals and quarantine centres, tracing close contacts of the infected, undertaking compulsory restriction and testing operations, etc. Our multi-pronged strategy has clearly worked to minimise imported cases and curb the spread of the disease in Hong Kong, but as we go forward we still have to count on mass vaccination. It is not only the most effective measure for controlling COVID-19, it's also the key to resuming normal life and to getting back to business. With that objective in mind, the Government launched earlier this week the Early Vaccination for All campaign. Under the campaign, the Government and different sectors in the community have and will continue to roll out various measures and reward programmes to encourage members of the public to get vaccinated as soon as possible. These include vaccination leave for our employees, dining and spending rewards, as well as lucky draws for air tickets, MTR annual passes and even a residential flat offered to those who have been vaccinated. I appeal to all of you for your support, not only in getting the job yourselves, but also in finding innovative means to encourage your colleagues, your employees and your customers to do the same.

If we can raise the vaccination rate to a satisfactory level, thereby effectively controlling the epidemic, I am confident that Hong Kong economy can rebound quickly. In fact, the Hong Kong economy recovered visibly in the first quarter of this year, with real GDP achieving an appreciable year-on-year growth of 7.9 per cent. Together with strong economic growth in Mainland China, and encouraging recovery in the region as a whole, the prospect is optimistic.

Infrastructure investment will be a key driver of that economic revival. Our annual capital works expenditure in the coming years will exceed HK\$100 billion, while total construction output is expected to rise to about HK\$300 billion a year. That should create more than 300 000 construction jobs, as well as ample opportunity for the engineering sector.

Housing and socio-economic development will continue to lead the way. My Government has already identified land for building over 300 000 flats to meet demand identified in the 10-year long term housing strategy. And we'll press ahead with the study on the 1 000-hectare reclamation for the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands, the first-phase development of the Lantau Tomorrow Vision. Lantau, with its comprehensive aviation and transport network, offers seamless connections to the neighbouring cities of the Greater Bay Area and

the world beyond. No less important, it will give us the luxury of land for better living space, for sustainable communities and for a third business core of Hong Kong. It will, in short, power Hong Kong's long-term economic development.

Another thing that will power Hong Kong's long-term economic development is certainly innovation and technology, which the President has just spoken about. The construction industry has been at the forefront of technology adoption, with financial support under the HK\$1 billion Construction Innovation and Technology Fund. Such adoption includes the use of Building Information Modelling, Modular Integrated Construction, robotics, digital works supervision system and other advanced technology. I am glad that the Institution is going to host an Innovation Expo next Saturday and Sunday to showcase the boundless promise in fusing engineering and innovation and technology. The timely event will run under the theme of "Believing is Seeing – Innovation for Transformation." The in-house and online expo will feature a variety of seminars and competitions, as well as a virtual exhibition. The exhibition will spotlight engineering innovation at every level, from primary, secondary and university students to Institution members. That sounds like an innovative combination.

It's also a reminder that talent is our prime asset. Which is why we enhanced our support for the engineering sector through the Anti-epidemic Fund. The initiative allows companies to employ engineering graduates for the Institution of Engineers' Scheme "A" Graduate Training, increasing subsidy places from about 270 to 1 000. And I am pleased to say that all the 1 000 places have been filled. Some 2 000 graduates and young professionals in engineering, architecture, surveying, town planning and landscaping are being supported through a similar scheme run by the Development Bureau.

And I am pleased to note that your Institution has been building links with the Greater Bay Area, with a view to enabling more engineers to tap into this fast-growing area. The Construction Industry Council, with the support of the Development Bureau, is also working to enhance collaboration with its Mainland counterparts. In addition, my Government has implemented a variety of measures, including the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme, to support youth employment in the region. I count on the Institution to encourage these initiatives, to help our young professionals take full advantage of the opportunities there for Hong Kong in the Mainland and, in particular, the Greater Bay Area.

Friends, tonight I am speaking to you on Hong Kong's future with far more optimism than during any other moment as the Chief Executive. This is because with the improvement to Hong Kong's electoral system based on the Decision made by the National People's Congress (NPC) on March 11 this year, the amended Annex I and Annex II to the Basic Law approved by the NPC Standing Committee on March 30 and amendments to local legislation passed by the Legislative Council on May 27, we will be seeing a far more rational LegCo, more constructive relationship between the executive and the legislature, and ultimately more effective governance. We will have greater assurance that infrastructure projects for the benefit of Hong Kong and Hong

Kong's integration into the Mainland development will not be hijacked, obstructed or politicised; we will be able to literally build for Hong Kong's future.

I would therefore urge my fellow engineers to play an active role in Hong Kong's political structure, as one of the 15 ex-officio members on the Election Committee Engineering Subsector, such as the President of HKIE, as well as by competing in the other 15 seats in this subsector to be returned by elections amongst over 60 corporate voters. As for the Engineering Functional Constituency seat in LegCo to be elected by individual voters in the same conventional way, I believe it will be highly competitive.

To conclude, may I express appreciation to the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers, to our engineering sector, and to each and every one of you for your critical contributions to the health and well-being of our economy and the people of Hong Kong. I look forward, in just a few minutes, to the annual awards presentation, to acknowledging and celebrating a few of the supremely talented engineers powering your dynamic profession and our future. As for next year's Institution of Engineers annual event, I'm sure we all look forward to the return of dinner. Thank you very much.

