

# Speech by CE at opening ceremony of Women Power Forum (English Only) (with photo/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the opening ceremony of Women Power Forum this afternoon (July 29):

Deputy Director Qiu Hong (Deputy Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), Director Mou Hong (Director of the Liaison Department of the All-China Women's Federation), Annie (Supervising Advisor of the Hong Kong Federation of Women, Dr Annie Wu), Pansy (Chairperson of the Hong Kong Federation of Women, Ms Pansy Ho), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I am really pleased to join the inaugural Women Power Forum and to greet so many of you.

Power is a word of many meanings and permutations. For the vast majority of women – here in Hong Kong, in Asia and around the world – power is about gender equality, about changing cultures and stereotypes at every level of every society. Last month, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres addressed this issue, saying "let us use our power to build a world where women and men have equal rights, as well as equal opportunities to realise their aspirations."

I believe that's why we're here, why some 400 female leaders from all over the world have gathered here in Hong Kong today. For that, my thanks to the organiser, the Hong Kong Federation of Women, and the joint-organiser, the Golden Bauhinia Women Entrepreneur Association. Each is led by Hong Kong women making a difference for women in our community and in our economy.

Women in Hong Kong have come a long way since the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 22 years ago. In 1997, Elsie Leung became our first Secretary for Justice and Rita Fan Hong Kong's first female Legislative Council President. In 2006, Dr Margaret Chan, our first female Director of Health, was named Director-General of the World Health Organization. These and many other "game changers," in business, sports, arts and culture, technology and innovation, have blazed a trail for Hong Kong women.

Today, nearly half of our public accountants and solicitors are female. Women represent 54 per cent of all students enrolled in Hong Kong universities, a long way from 1921, when the University of Hong Kong admitted its first female student. The percentage of female students studying in engineering and other traditionally male-dominated disciplines has increased markedly. In the last academic year, for example, more than 50 per cent of our medical students were women – up from 37 per cent some 20 years ago.

Managerial positions in Hong Kong have gone from about 20 per cent filled by women to 35 per cent over the past two decades. And more than one-third of Hong Kong civil servants at the directorate level are women, a welcome increase from just over 15 per cent two decades ago.

But still, the participation rate of our female labour force last year was just under 51 per cent, well under the 68.5 per cent participation rate for men. It is also well below the 61 per cent in Mainland China, and 60 per cent in Singapore. So, we have some ways to go still. As the first female Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, I am keenly aware of that. And I look to a man, Dr C K Law, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, to help me to achieve that objective.

I can tell you that my Government accords high priority to creating a more enabling environment for women wanting to join, or remain, in the workforce. In terms of policy, we are strengthening our support for families in areas ranging from child-care and elderly support services, to ensuring a breastfeeding-friendly workplace and implementing family-friendly employment practices.

In my Policy Address last October, I announced a number of measures. They include extending maternity leave from 10 weeks to 14 weeks. The additional four weeks' leave pay will be borne by the Government in full. We plan to move that on to the Legislative Council later this year.

We are also working to expand the number of female members in statutory boards and advisory committees. We want more women's voices to be heard in policy-making. And to promote women's participation in the boards of listed companies, we called on all listed companies to appoint more female board members. Laura Cha, let me add, became the first female chairperson of the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited last year.

There's a lot more in the works, but rest assured that my Government is committed to expediting opportunities for women in the private and public sectors, and in our community as a whole. In this respect, we have a great partner, the Women's Commission chaired by Madam Chan Yuen-han, to help me. We are dedicated to advancing the development of women, to creating a thriving future for all. By the way, the preparatory work for the next Policy Address has already started. I welcome your views and suggestions, particularly on what we can do more in promoting gender equality.

My thanks again to the organisers for inviting me to this forum. I know that the discussion sessions this afternoon feature many distinguished speakers from many different countries, so I am sure you will all have a rewarding forum. I wish you all a wonderful day, and for our guests from the Mainland and overseas, a very pleasant stay in Hong Kong.

Thank you very much.

