Speech by CE at opening session of Asia Summit on Global Health (English only) (with photo/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the opening session of the Asia Summit on Global Health today (November 24):

Deputy Director Yin Zonghua (Deputy Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), Minister Ong Ye Kung (Minister for Health of Singapore), Dr Peter Lam (Chairman of Hong Kong Trade Development Council), distinguished speakers, guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you, in person and online, to the inaugural Asia Summit on Global Health, ASGH. I must first express my sincere thanks to Peter, Chairman of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (TDC) for coming up with this great idea of an Asia summit on the topic of health early this year, and for the excellent work done by his TDC colleagues in putting together such a rich programme consisting of illustrious speakers, both locally and globally. Given the importance of health which now calls for global actions, and which at the same time offers huge business opportunities, I have no doubt that the ASGH will in no time join the ranks of other highly successful signature events of the TDC, including the annual Asian Financial Forum, AFF, and the annual Belt and Road Summit. My Government takes pleasure in co-organising this meaningful event, and we will do so year after year as it fits so well into our vision for Hong Kong's future.

Before I talk about opportunities, let us together recap what we have learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic which has now haunted the world for almost two years, and sadly claimed over 5 million lives. For a public health crisis of this magnitude, as the World Health Organization has repeatedly reminded us, no one is safe until everyone is safe. While different governments may have adopted different strategies in coping with COVID-19, there should be no doubt that:

First, governments must follow a science-based approach in responding to the pandemic and strive for collaboration rather than confrontation;

Second, we must promote research and development (R&D) and render support to international co-operation of our scientists who are racing against time to find the right vaccines and cure; and

Third, we must pursue inclusive and sustainable development and make sure nobody is left behind.

Against that backdrop, this summit, under the theme "Shaping a Resilient

and Sustainable Future", provides a timely and invaluable forum for government officials, scientists, healthcare practitioners, corporate leaders and investors to exchange views on a wide range of issues, such as developments and trends in global public health, medical technology, digital health, health equity, healthcare innovation and investment, and many others.

When Peter and I first discussed an Asia summit on global health, we immediately came to the same view that Hong Kong is best positioned to be the host. Geographically, Hong Kong is a hub in Asia and for decades, a gateway into the Mainland of China. As fully demonstrated in the COVID-19 pandemic, our country is placing utmost importance on the health of its people and according to the 14th Five-Year Plan promulgated in March this year, life sciences will be high on the agenda of more pioneering R&D in the coming years. Hong Kong, which has been playing a connecting role between the Mainland and the rest of the world, stands ready to embrace healthcare development.

Another factor is our high quality public health and hospital services. Hong Kong's health indicators in terms of infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate and life expectancy at birth are amongst the world's best.

Over the years, Hong Kong has established a solid foundation in research through world-class universities and technological infrastructure. To start with, we have five universities among the world's top 100, and among them two excellent medical schools. Indeed, according to the latest Times Higher Education World University Rankings, the University of Hong Kong has risen to the world's number 20 in clinical and health subjects. We have an enviable group of world renowned experts in biomedical research who frequently won local and overseas science awards. They include Professor Dennis Lo, a speaker today, who pioneered the development of non-invasive prenatal diagnostic tests for multiple genetic disorders, which benefits millions of pregnant women world-wide every year and Professor Tony Mok, also a speaker today, who and his team are the first to confirm clinical application of precision medicine for certain types of lung cancer, which has been conducive to the development of multiple generations of targeted therapy.

Our research excellence is well recognised internationally. Based on the latest Research Assessment Exercise conducted by the University Grants Committee and evaluated by a large pool of overseas distinguished scholars and experts, about 25 per cent and 45 per cent of the research projects of our publicly funded universities assessed were judged to be "world leading" and "internationally excellent" respectively. Such remarkable performance is a testimony to the high standards of Hong Kong's research quality.

Since taking office more than four years ago, I have accorded personal attention to the development of innovation and technology in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has invested heavily with a total commitment of over HK$130 billion thus far and our flagship innovation and technology initiative is the establishment of the InnoHK research clusters. The two research clusters comprise 28 research laboratories jointly set up by local universities and world renowned

universities and research institutes, and among them, 16 are focusing on biomedical and healthcare-related technology. These R&D centres have commenced operation at the Hong Kong Science Park progressively.

We have a vibrant ecosystem for start-ups, including those focusing on health-related areas. Indeed, we can see that exciting new businesses are emerging, particularly in the digital healthcare sector in which many promising new AI (artificial intelligence) applications are being developed in the field of internet healthcare, big data, etc. Currently, there are more than 200 health technology-related start-ups in the Hong Kong Science Park. Through its Corporate Venture Fund, the Hong Kong Science Park has invested in six such start-ups, with a total investment of HK$67 million. At the same time, these start-ups have attracted significant investment from Science Park's co-investors, which amounts to over HK$1.1 billion. At our another important technological infrastructure, that is the Cyberport, there are also over 90 start-ups focusing on health technology and these companies have raised around HK$120 million since 2017.

As these start-ups continue to grow, they should have no problem in getting the financial services and equity that they need, given Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre. Since April 2018, the Hong Kong Exchange has introduced a new regime including rules to allow the listing of pre-revenue or pre-profit biotechnology companies. As at mid-November this year, 45 pre-revenue or pre-profit biotechnology companies have been successfully listed on Hong Kong Exchange, with a total of some HK$110 billion raised through IPOs (initial public offerings). Furthermore, we have expanded the scope of eligible securities under our Stock Connect programmes with Shanghai and Shenzhen to cover the pre-revenue or pre-profit biotech companies, thereby attracting investment from the Mainland. With all these efforts, Hong Kong is now Asia's largest and the world's second-largest fundraising hub for biotech companies.

In addition, a diversified range of investment products tracking these biotech stocks, such as biotechnology stock index and exchange-traded funds, have been launched. As the product offering increases, investors, from public and private equity funds to sovereign wealth and hedge funds, have also joined the Hong Kong biotech market, along with large cornerstone investors and specialist funds, who bring healthcare expertise to the market. This will in turn help spur the development of the health and life sciences sector in Hong Kong.

I should also mention our robust Intellectual Property protection regime, which is an essential element to promote innovation and technological development, particularly in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries. Between 2014 and 2020, about 30 per cent of the patent filings from local and overseas applications received by our Intellectual Property Department are in the fields of biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and medical technology. This is testimony to Hong Kong being an important market of pharmaceutical and healthcare products globally. Let me add that our Original Grant Patent system, first launched in December 2019 to provide an additional and alternative path for patent applications to seek standard patent protection

directly in Hong Kong, has been well received. As of end October this year, some 9 per cent of the more than 500 Original Grant Patent applications received are related to inventions of biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and medical technology.

Ladies and gentlemen, what I have been telling you is only what we already have, or what we have already achieved. Now that with the staunch support of the Central Government, Hong Kong has overcome the political challenges that have impeded our progress in many respects and has been given the mission to develop an international innovation and technology hub under our country's 14th Five Year Plan, my Government will spare no efforts in building on our strengths to drive Hong Kong's healthcare development. As outlined in my 2021 Policy Address delivered last month, we do have some ambitious plans to strengthen our capabilities on various fronts, in order to prepare Hong Kong for the enormous opportunities ahead in the area of health and life sciences.

First, we will boost our healthcare R&D infrastructure. The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park in the Lok Ma Chau Loop will be completed by phases from 2024 onwards. One of the priority development areas of the Park will be healthcare technologies, and we plan to set up an InnoLife Healthtech Hub there. This new hub will bring together the current 16 life and health-related laboratories in the InnoHK research clusters that I have just mentioned and the eight State Key Laboratories in life and health disciplines in Hong Kong. It will focus on R&D of biomedicine, physics, engineering, artificial intelligence and so on for application in the fields of prevention, diagnosis, pathology tracking, medicine, surgical micro-robots, advanced treatment, rehabilitation, etc. With some HK$6 billion earmarked for its operations in the next few years, we expect that InnoLife will become a prominent platform in attracting and gathering start-ups or large enterprises in life and health disciplines from around the world.

Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park in the Lok Ma Chau Loop is only about 87 hectares in size, which is obviously not sufficient for our promising future. Thus in my Policy Address, I announced the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, which will develop the northern part of Hong Kong, about 300 square kilometers in size, that is about one-third of Hong Kong's landmass, into a vibrant metropolis. Innovation and technology will be the economic engine of this metropolis, and an area called the San Tin Technopole, which is near the Lok Ma Chau area, will provide another 150 hectares of land for innovation and technology, which will be disposed of in a strategic manner to accommodate research and advanced manufacturing industries.

Other initiatives to enhance the infrastructure include the continued expansion of the Hong Kong Science Park and the Cyberport as well as allocation of extra land to the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong for research use. We are also embarking on an ambitious public hospital expansion programme to provide more and better facilities. A dedicated Children's Hospital is in operation and a Chinese Medicine Hospital, the first of its kind in Hong Kong, is under construction.

To tie in with the Northern Metropolis vision, we plan to develop new acute hospitals in this region which will shoulder a stronger role in supporting clinical research.

Hardware aside, we will continue to enrich Hong Kong's healthcare ecosystem through a combination of R&D funding, education to nurture local talents and recruitment of scientists from overseas and the Mainland. I am pleased to say that the Global STEM Professorship Scheme launched in June this year has attracted renowned scientists and scholars to come to work in Hong Kong's universities. Over 40 distinguished scholars and their research teams from eight economies recruited in the first batch are gradually arriving. We are reviewing a second batch of nominees under the Scheme.

Health and life sciences researches require clinical data and clinical trials. It helps that our clinical trial centres are recognised by the National Medical Products Administration, and their data which meet the relevant clinical trial standards are also widely recognised by relevant bodies in the United States and the European Union. It also helps that unlike in many other cities, public hospital service in Hong Kong is highly concentrated and hence the sole service provider, the Hospital Authority, is in possession of a huge amount of valuable data for research. In this connection, the Hospital Authority will continue to streamline and standardise the administrative procedures for multi-clusters clinical research involving commercial sponsor, and to explore collaboration with the Hong Kong Science Park on the use of clinical data for R&D.

Concurrently, the Department of Health has also been implementing a number of facilitating measures in recent years to ensure clinical trials are approved in a timely manner. These include extending the validity period of clinical trial certificates from two to five years, streamlining and simplifying the application procedures for non-First in Human trials, and developing an online submission system to facilitate the application for clinical trial certificates. The Government will also expedite the legislative process for registration of drugs containing new chemical or biological entities with a view to making relevant pharmaceutical products available in the market as early as possible, supporting the development of life and health technology and benefitting more patients in need.

In today's summit, a couple of sessions are devoted to opportunities arising from co-operation with the Mainland, particularly the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area which has a population of some 86 million. To facilitate such exchanges and collaboration, we have obtained the Central Government's support in relaxing the limitation on exporting Mainland human genetic resources to Hong Kong and in allowing the use of Hong Kong-registered drugs and medical appliances in selected medical institutions in the Greater Bay Area Mainland cities. I am sure experts joining those sessions will have more insights to share and I can confidently say that the future looks bright.

In short, ladies and gentlemen, Hong Kong is willing and ready to play a pivotal role in promoting better understanding of global health issues, in

pursuing research excellence and medical innovation to tackle some growing health issues, and in matching businesses with trade and investment opportunities in the Asian region. Above all, we believe advances in health and life sciences will benefit mankind. I sincerely invite you all to join us, here in Hong Kong, to create an exciting future.

I wish you all a very rewarding summit and hope that when this summit returns next year, we will be welcoming more overseas and Mainland guests attending in person. Thank you very much.