

Speech by Commissioner of Correctional Services at annual press conference

Following is the translation of the speech given by the Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Woo Ying-ming, at the Correctional Services Department (CSD)'s annual press conference today (February 14):

Role of the CSD

The CSD plays a crucial role in the Hong Kong criminal justice system. We uphold the mission to protect public safety and prevent crime for a better Hong Kong. In 2018, while the CSD encountered various challenges, all correctional officers were professional and impartial in ensuring a secure, safe, humane, decent and healthy custodial environment at all times in pursuance of their responsibilities and powers vested by law. Moreover, the CSD, in collaboration with various community stakeholders, has created rehabilitation opportunities to help persons in custody reintegrate into society upon release. Furthermore, we have been promoting law-abiding and inclusive values through community education with a view to preventing crime and contributing to society.

Profile of Persons in Custody and Supervisees

Last year, the average daily penal population at correctional facilities was 8,303 persons, representing a slight decrease of 3 per cent compared with the figure (8,529 persons) in 2017. The average occupancy rate was 74 per cent. Among the penal population:

- (i) 77 per cent were sentenced persons and 23 per cent were remands;
- (ii) 80 per cent were males and 20 per cent were females;
- (iii) 96 per cent were aged 21 or above and 4 per cent were aged under 21; and
- (iv) 67 per cent were local, 12 per cent were from the Mainland, Taiwan and Macao, and the remaining 21 per cent were from other countries.

Apart from managing persons in custody, the CSD also helps rehabilitated persons reintegrate into society through statutory supervision. As at the end of 2018, about 1,400 persons were still under the statutory supervision of the CSD.

In 2018, there were 17,340 new admissions of sentenced persons or remands under the CSD, representing a decrease of 6 per cent from 18,531 admissions in 2017. A total of 119 persons in custody with high security risk (i.e. Category A persons in custody) were newly admitted. Among them, 80 per cent had committed drug-related offences and 20 per cent had committed serious offences like murder and manslaughter. For the newly admitted Category A persons in custody, 28 per cent were from other countries. As at the end of 2018, the total number of Category A persons in custody was 527 persons, which was similar to the figure (535 persons) of last year.

Safe Custody

It is our utmost duty to provide a safe and secure custodial environment and to help persons in custody rehabilitate and reintegrate into society. In light of the large-scale prison riots or escapes in some countries or places in the world in recent years, we have taken the initiative to review and strengthen preventive measures, contingency plans and staff equipment from time to time to curb all illicit activities proactively.

There has been no successful escape case in Hong Kong for 11 years in a row, from 2008 to 2018. In 2018, the CSD conducted 8,230 joint search/special search/night raid operations in institutions, covering 12,885 locations, representing increases of 7 per cent and 8 per cent respectively compared with the relevant figures in 2017.

While most of the persons in custody conform to order and discipline and show a sense of remorse, some commit acts of indiscipline. These acts adversely affect the order of institutions and the safety of others. In 2018, there were eight cases of concerted acts of indiscipline, an increase of three cases over the year before, with 181 participants involved. These included fighting and inciting other persons in custody to get involved in collective actions, such as refusing to eat or lodging a collective complaint. The case that involved the most participants took place on November 21, 2018, in which a total of 66 persons in custody in Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre lodged a collective complaint. Out of these eight cases, five resulted in 12 persons in custody being injured, while four cases were referred to other law enforcement agencies for follow-up and investigation. Among the 181 participants involved in concerted acts of indiscipline, 96 per cent (173 participants) were 21 years old or above, and the remaining 4 per cent (eight participants) were under 21 years old. Moreover, 62 per cent of the participants had triad backgrounds and were involved in six cases. With the strong support of the Regional Response Teams, institution management restored discipline at the institutions within a short period of time. Since the establishment of the Regional Response Teams in 2016, we have achieved effective results in safeguarding the security of institutions and in the escort of high-security risk persons in custody. We therefore plan to extend the Regional Response Teams to other regions and individual institutions.

In the same year, there were 4,265 disciplinary charges against persons in custody. The number of charges still remained high despite a slight decrease of 6 per cent compared with the year before. Charges of "offending good order and discipline" and "possession of any unauthorised article" ranked first and second respectively, accounting for 33 per cent and 25 per cent of the total number of disciplinary charges. In 2018, there were 2,714 persons of custody subject to disciplinary charges, representing a slight decrease of 2 per cent compared with the figure of 2017. Among them, 320 (12 per cent) committed three or more disciplinary offences, accounting for 34 per cent of the total number of disciplinary charges.

As for cases involving violent acts, a total of 483 cases were recorded in 2018, mainly involving fighting among persons in custody and assaulting others (including correctional officers), representing a decrease of 63 cases from 2017. Among these cases, 26 cases were of a more serious nature and were reported to the Police for follow-up. The number of correctional officers who were injured while stopping violence or other behaviour was 39 in total. Most of these injuries were minor, and there were 16 more persons compared with 23 persons in 2017.

In 2018, there were seven cases involving correctional officers being assaulted in the course of duty, representing a decrease of one case from eight cases in 2017. The number of correctional officers injured on duty also decreased from six persons to three persons. Most of the injuries were relatively minor.

The CSD is also committed to stopping the smuggling of drugs into correctional institutions. Last year, there were 25 cases of seized drugs, including 16 cases of body-cavity concealment of drugs. The majority of the seized drugs were heroin and other psychotropic drugs, and the cases mainly involved newly admitted persons in custody. We will step up our efforts in drug interception work to ensure a safe and secure custodial environment.

Apart from combating illicit activities and acts of indiscipline, correctional officers have to stay vigilant at all times to detect and stop persons in custody from harming themselves. In 2018, there were 48 self-harm cases, representing a decrease of 52 per cent from 99 cases in 2017. The majority of these cases were discovered in time and the persons in custody concerned were successfully rescued by correctional officers. Unfortunately, two persons in custody died last year despite our tireless efforts. The incidents were reported to the Police for investigation and subsequent death inquests.

Over the years, the numbers relating to medical escort duties have remained high. The manpower deployed for medical escort duties increased from approximately 37,000 man days in 2015 to around 41,000 man days in 2017, while the number exceeded 38,000 man days in 2018.

Regarding correctional facilities, the CSD has been carrying out various improvement projects to enhance the security and operational efficiency of the institutions, such as the installation of an electric locks security system in Stanley Prison, as well as the replacement and enhancement of the closed-circuit television systems with new digital systems in seven institutions (Stanley Prison, Pak Sha Wan Correctional Institution, Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre, Tung Tau Correctional Institution, Tong Fuk Correctional Institution, Tai Lam Correctional Institution and Pik Uk Prison). In regard to replacing the core information technology systems with the Integrated Custodial and Rehabilitation Management System, the tendering procedure for the project was completed in May last year. The new system is scheduled to come into operation in phases in 2022.

In January this year, we consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Security on the proposal to install the electric locks security system, with

a facial recognition function to verify the identity of staff, in Pik Uk Correctional Institution, with a view to enhancing the efficiency of prison management and the level of security.

We also plan to construct the Correctional Services Department Headquarters Building at Shing Tai Road, Chai Wan. The offices and other special and general facilities in different districts will be relocated to the same building for better co-ordination and operational efficiency, and to tie in with the future development of the department. This project obtained the support of the Planning, Works and Housing Committee under the Eastern District Council in December 2017. The CSD will follow up with the Architectural Services Department and seek funding approval at an appropriate time.

Rehabilitation Work

The CSD has been fostering closer partnerships with different community stakeholders, including the 18 District Fight Crime Committees, charitable organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the business sector and universities. Through diversified programmes and activities, we seek to enhance community support for rehabilitation work and help persons in custody reintegrate into society after release.

Programmes implemented last year included district-based publicity activities co-organised with the District Fight Crime Committees, the registration programme for Caring Employers, the Thank You NGO Month and the exhibition "Women Who Shine Through the Wall – Therapeutic Drawings by Female Persons in Custody". The CSD has also strengthened collaboration with academic institutions. We co-organised the NGO Forum cum Outstanding NGO Volunteer Award Presentation Ceremony and several research studies, such as the evaluation of the effectiveness of drug treatment programmes and a three-year study on rehabilitated persons, with local universities.

We proactively implement diversified and appropriate rehabilitation programmes, including counselling, education and market-oriented industrial and vocational training, to help persons in custody equip themselves with skills and build up self-confidence, so that they can reintegrate into society and start afresh after release. Last year, Life Gym – the first Positive Living Centre for male persons in custody – was officially launched in Stanley Prison. Through treatment programmes and competition-based activities, a Clinical Psychologist will assist persons in custody in need to resist criminal thinking and prevent violence. They are also encouraged to cultivate a healthy lifestyle in the institution.

The CSD arranges for convicted adult persons in custody to engage in work according to statutory provisions. The introduction of advanced computerised production facilities, such as the computer numerical control routing machine, not only boosts productivity, but also enables them to acquire up-to-date skills and common knowledge, such as understanding of regulations on quality management and occupational safety and health. Such skills and knowledge will enhance their employability in different sectors in

future to facilitate reintegration into society.

Twenty vocational training courses are provided for young persons in custody. Forty-one market-oriented courses, with a total of over 1,400 places, are available on a voluntary basis to adult persons in custody who are due for discharge within three to 24 months and legally reside and seek employment in Hong Kong. Last year saw the introduction of new foundation certificate courses in Floor Laying for Interior Renovation and AutoCAD in Renovation Drawings. This year, we will roll out new foundation certificate courses in Virtual Reality Welding, Virtual Reality Visual Merchandising and Retail Management as well as Car Beauty. All these courses are organised by various local training bodies, and have attained Qualifications Framework levels or are accredited by professional bodies. They help rehabilitated persons to work or enrol in bridging or progressive courses in future.

The overall passing rate of vocational training examinations was 97.9 per cent last year (98.1 per cent and 97.3 per cent for adult and young persons in custody respectively). Their employment rates after six months of employment follow-up period upon release were respectively 83.1 per cent and 93.4 per cent. On education, the overall passing rate in public examinations was 62.9 per cent last year (60.4 per cent and 68 per cent for adult and young persons in custody respectively). One person in custody attained Level 5 in the subject of Economics under the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination. Another one even obtained 21 marks overall in six papers. Moreover, 10 persons in custody were awarded bachelor's degrees and one was awarded a master's degree, the sum of which represented the best result achieved so far. On the education of young persons in custody, the department introduced elements of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education last year to strengthen their logical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Over the years, the CSD has been promoting rehabilitation work and seeking public support for and acceptance of rehabilitated persons so as to reduce their re-offending risks. These efforts help make Hong Kong a safer society. Over the past 10 years or so, based on 2000 and 2016 as the respective years of discharge, Hong Kong's recidivism rate (the percentage of re-admission of local persons in custody to correctional institutions following conviction of a new offence within two years after discharge) has seen a substantial decrease from 39.9 per cent to 24.8 per cent. In essence, the reduction reflects the outcome jointly made through the hard work of correctional officers, the determination of persons in custody and rehabilitated persons to turn over a new leaf, and the growing support from stakeholders in the community. In this connection, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all stakeholders concerned and our friends from the media.

In particular, the recidivism rate of young persons (those who were under 21 during their previous sentence) dropped from 11.9 per cent in 2015 to 10.2 per cent in 2016, representing a decrease of 1.7 percentage points. In parallel, the recidivism rate of adults dropped from 28.3 per cent in 2015 to 25.7 per cent in 2016, representing a decrease of 2.6 percentage points.

Community Education and Effectiveness in Crime Prevention

On community education, the CSD disseminates information to students and young people on the importance of leading a law-abiding and drug-free life as well as supporting rehabilitation through the Rehabilitation Pioneer Project which includes, amongst others, a programme named "The Reflective Path". In 2018, the attendance of various activities under the Project was 48,093, including 44,876 young participants which represented a 23 per cent increase from 36,506 in 2017. The programmes were well received with positive responses.

To further enhance effectiveness, the CSD established a uniformed group of Rehabilitation Pioneer Leaders last year for young people with leadership potential. Our objective is to help broaden their horizons, develop their potential and discipline and strengthen a sense of social responsibility through diversified training programmes. They are also encouraged to actively contribute to society in future by helping to promote law-abiding and inclusive values for a better Hong Kong. So far, two cohorts of 60 members (three of them being ethnic minority youths) have been recruited. Subject to availability of resources, recruitment will be conducted every year with a view to expanding the membership to cover more areas of Hong Kong.

Human Resources

The CSD is still undergoing a peak period of staff wastage. In 2017-18, we recruited 44 Officers and 435 Assistant Officers II. We expect to recruit about 50 Officers and, depending on vacancy situations, about 350 Assistant Officers II for filling of posts in 2018-19. In respect of staff quarters, a project at Tin Wan, Aberdeen, is under construction and expected to provide 70 units within 2019.

Smart Prison Development Plan

In 2018, the CSD formulated a Strategic Plan for future development. The objective of the Strategic Plan is, amongst others, to build a sustainable correctional system with an integrated operational protocol through development of a smart prison system. In accordance with the 2018 Policy Address and with the Security Bureau's support, the CSD, in collaboration with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, the Architectural Services Department and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, plans to introduce smart elements in our major facility improvement proposals in future.

The smart prison concept comprises four elements, namely "development of smart governance", "implementation of process innovation", "cultivating knowledge-based correctional officers and enhancing the capacities of rehabilitated persons to reintegrate into the society" and "application of smart prison designs to operate correctional institutions". The CSD strives to enhance efficiency of custodial operations and security of correctional institutions through the application of innovation and technology, while

protecting the safety of correctional officers in the course of law enforcement and ensuring the safety of persons in custody at the same time.

Currently, we are conducting trials in specific areas of individual institutions, using innovation and technology such as video analytics and more to modernise the operations of correctional facilities, with a view to enhancing the efficiency and security of prison management. The trial projects include the installation of the Health Signs Monitoring System in the centre hospital of Lo Wu Correctional Institution (LWCI), the Video Analytic Monitoring System in four dormitories of Pik Uk Prison for monitoring of abnormal behaviours and acts of indiscipline of persons in custody, and the Passage Surveillance System in designated passages of LWCI. In the long term, the smart prison concept should be expanded to cover both the hardware and the software of correctional institutions. The ultimate objective is to combine operational systems and innovation and technology to collect, analyse and apply data in various areas, with a view to enhancing the efficiency of institutional management and operations, strengthening our readiness in emergency response, and facilitating long-term strategic planning.

Conclusion

Over the past year, the CSD has risen to different challenges and made solid progress in various areas of work. It would not be possible without the concerted efforts and whole-hearted dedication of our colleagues. Moreover, I would like to extend my special thanks to members of the public, community stakeholders, voluntary organisations, volunteers and friends of the media for their unfailing support and assistance in facilitating our work. I also take this opportunity to call on the public to continue to support and help rehabilitated persons reintegrate into society, and join hands in building a better Hong Kong.