

Speech by CS at Donor Appreciation Cocktail Reception of Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (English only)

Following is the speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, at the Donor Appreciation Cocktail Reception of the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation today (June 15):

Ms Chen (Foundation Chair of the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong, Ms Judy Chen), Mr Kung (Chairman of Ocean Park, Mr Leo Kung), Ms Gendron (Foundation Director of the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong, Ms Suzanne Gendron), Dr Fong (Associate Professor of Lingnan University, Mr Jonathan Fong), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. It is my honour to join you again this year at the Donor Appreciation Cocktail Reception of the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation. When I was approached to lend my support to host this meaningful fund-raising event at Victoria House, I did not hesitate for a moment as wildlife conservation is always a subject dear to my heart.

Ocean Park Conservation Foundation has been a committed and valued partner of us when it comes to conservation of Asian wildlife. As revealed from this year's theme "giant panda conservation", it further underlines the Foundation's commitment and dedication in promoting the biodiversity in the region with an emphasis on giant pandas. The reason is obvious – not only are they iconic endangered species, but also "umbrella species", meaning protecting the species would indirectly protect the many other species that make up the ecological chain of its habitat.

To this end, the Foundation has supported numerous projects on giant panda over the years. The flagship project being the two-year Jockey Club Giant Panda Junior Volunteer Programme jointly organised by the Ocean Park and the Foundation launched in 2016. A custom-designed initiative for secondary school students, the programme encourages participants to nurture a love for nature through first-hand experiences, develop a sense of responsibility to protect wildlife and the natural environment and take concrete actions through volunteer work.

The highlight of this two-year programme was a five-day trip to Wolong National Nature Reserve attended by some 60 secondary students aged between 12 to 16 during May to July last year. Upon return to Hong Kong, the students were trained to become "conservation ambassadors" to share their experiences with people in Hong Kong. So far, they have reached out to over 72 000 local and foreign visitors visiting Ocean Park, Hong Kong Wetland Park and country parks to promote wildlife conservation awareness, contributing over 3 000 voluntary hours in the past two years. During my visit to Sichuan last month, I was thrilled by the compliments from my counterparts there on the

remarkable contribution made by the concerted efforts of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the Hong Kong community including the Ocean Park to the reconstruction of the national nature reserve and restoration of infrastructure in Sichuan.

The Foundation is also a devoted partner of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government in the promotion of marine animal conservation. This cross-sector partnership has successfully established an effective response programme to attend to every stranding case in Hong Kong swiftly and conduct follow-up investigation timely and professionally. Since its establishment in 2006, the programme has handled over 380 stranding cases from which samples collected have provided us valuable basis for the development of science-based conservation plans for these species and their habitats.

Looking ahead, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government will continue to join hands with the international community in preserving our environment. To control ivory trade for protection of elephants, we have brought into operation the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants (Amendment) Ordinance since May this year. Accordingly, a three-step plan is being taken forward to ban the commercial possession of all ivory (except antique ivory) in Hong Kong by end-December 2021.

On this encouraging note, I would like to thank the Foundation again for their sterling support for advocating, facilitating and participating in effective conservation of Asian wildlife. Much of the success in this respect relies heavily on the generosity of donors including many of you over the years. I appeal for your continuous support for preserving the precious wildlife habitats. Together, we can build a more liveable and harmonious environment for our next generation to share with other species on earth. Thank you!