

Speech by CS at online side event on Hong Kong-related issues during 49th session of United Nations Human Rights Council (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr John Lee, at the online side event on Hong Kong-related issues today (March 16) organised by the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva during the 49th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council:

Thank you, Minister Jiang (Minister of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland, Mr Jiang Duan), for the very kind introduction.

Good morning, Ambassador Chen (Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland, Mr Chen Xu), ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk to you about the situation in Hong Kong.

Let me begin by taking you back to more than two years ago, to June 2019. It was the darkest time of Hong Kong. Citizens witnessed continuously violent riots across the city. Never before had our streets seen such violent and random assaults, thousands of petrol bombs being thrown, destruction of public property, and widespread blocking of traffic, let alone the vicious attacks on the Police. Forces to incite Hong Kong's independence and foreign interference showed up blatantly. These unprecedented violence and disturbances threatened the security of our city so much that citizens were actually worried about their lives and safety. They were afraid even to talk about these evil acts of terror lest they might be targeted for retaliation by the perpetrators.

Such violence, destruction and chaos was stopped effectively after the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress promulgated the Hong Kong National Security Law about a year later. The Law filled the vacuum in national security because Hong Kong had no dedicated national security law before that. The Hong Kong National Security Law has restored peace and stability. People returned to their day-to-day life in peace and society resumed normal. Hong Kong's economy then staged a strong recovery in the following year – its GDP grew by 6.4 per cent in 2021.

It should be pointed out that in the lead-up to and during the 2019 violence, the Legislative Council was also full of scenes of sabotage, physical confrontation, disorderly conduct and incessant procrastination with actions to paralyse the Council, to obstruct the Government's governance and

to deliberately make "one country, two systems" an unsuccess. You can visualise this from the fact that some of its former members are currently pending trials for offences endangering national security.

No country will allow its legislative structure, parliament or congress to be filled up by treasonists, foreign agents or proxies of foreign forces. The Hong Kong electoral system must therefore be protected from exploitation and from foreign interference. The principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong" was therefore implemented to improve and protect it. Being patriotic is the minimum and common requirement for a person in any country to participate in its administration. Legislators under the improved electoral system are now required to satisfy two basic requirements. They are to "bear allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" and to "uphold the Basic Law". Aren't these two requirements very basic? They are not just basic – they are simply common and natural sense.

The improved electoral system also provides much broader and more balanced representation in society. Membership of the Legislative Council is increased from 70 to 90 in number, with a much wider spread across different backgrounds and political spectrum. The subsequent Legislative Council election was successfully held in December 2021 in an open, orderly and fair manner. All seats were contested, unlike previously when seats in some subsectors may automatically be elected because only one candidate was running. A lot of new faces appeared, drawing in talents from a wide range of backgrounds, now that they would not have to work in the former ridiculous phenomena of mayhem, physical confrontations, insults and paralysis. The newly elected members have been displaying commitment to serve the interests of Hong Kong wholeheartedly. The quality of scrutiny and debates, as well as the efficiency of the Legislative Council, has significantly improved.

In about two months, we shall hold the Chief Executive Election under the improved electoral system. An Election Committee, the membership of which has been increased by a quarter, will elect the Chief Executive. This practice of electing the Chief Executive by the Election Committee has not changed since day one of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

I must point out to you that the democratic process of Hong Kong started after China resumed exercising sovereignty. No country has monopoly on the model of democracy. The democratic development of Hong Kong is clearly defined under the Basic Law. It stipulates that the method for selecting the Chief Executive shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in Hong Kong, in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress, with the ultimate aim to select the Chief Executive by universal suffrage. Citizens' rights such as the right to vote and to stand for election and the freedoms of speech and of the press are well enshrined in the Basic Law. The exercise of these rights is well protected, in the same way as is covered in the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights applicable to Hong Kong.

Before I close, I think you may know that Hong Kong is currently battling the fifth wave of COVID-19 attack. We have suffered from an exponential increase of infected cases and a record high of serious illness

and deaths. Hong Kong seeks help and our Central People's Government comes to our help swiftly and without reservation. It provides help in building facilities, provides expertise and experience, and provides manpower assistance and materials of all kinds. Whatever Hong Kong requests, Hong Kong gets and gets them fast and in abundance. The unlimited support and help by the Central People's Government gives us very strong confidence that we shall beat COVID-19.

The "one country, two systems" principle is guaranteed by our Constitution and the Basic Law. There is no change to the 160 articles in the Basic Law since its promulgation. The Basic Law guarantees Hong Kong people's freedoms and rights and Hong Kong's long-term stability and prosperity. With Hong Kong's full integration into our country's development plans, its opportunities are unlimited.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Our anniversary theme is "A New Era – Stability • Prosperity • Opportunity", to highlight the abundant opportunities of Hong Kong and the bright future ahead. I invite you to join us either in person or online in the activities and events that will be held and see for yourselves a city of doing business, success stories, diversity, harmony and fun. Thank you.

