

Speech by S for S on Hong Kong National Security Law at side event webinar at 46th session of UN Human Rights Council (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, on the Hong Kong National Security Law at a side event webinar at the 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council today (March 1):

Thank you, Minister Jiang (Minister, 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 ladies and gentlemen. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the latest account of Hong Kong.

Before I do that, I would like to take you back to the time before June 2019, i.e., the time before Hong Kong was wrecked by violence. For those of you who have visited Hong Kong before then, you have witnessed in person that Hong Kong is a beautiful city, representing efficiency, safety, opportunities and vibrancy. Yet, all these were shattered by the violence and disturbances which lasted for about a year since June 2019. The mobsters and rioters ruined the city and pushed it into an abyss. They smashed shops, restaurants, railways and public facilities. They devastated the city by petrol bombs. Over 5 000 petrol bombs were thrown and more than 10 000 extra seized. They cruelly set a man ablaze with inflammable liquid. They killed a 70-year-old man by hurling a brick at him. They seriously attacked innocent people who held different opinions. Some were even tied up and humiliated. Police officers were targeted, stabbed by knives, poured with corrosive liquid, wounded by arrows, you name it. Six genuine firearms were seized together with over 1 000 rounds of genuine ammunition. Heavy explosives with remote control devices were also found, similar to those used in terrorist attacks in other places. Mobsters brazenly displayed flags advocating "Hong Kong independence". They preached what they called "mutual destruction", to jump off the cliff with Hong Kong. Some shameless individuals even incited fallacies such as "to break the law to achieve justice". The Legislative Council building was stormed and seriously devastated. Foreign intervention was rampant with money, supplies, and other forms of support provided to the mobsters.

What kind of people would destroy their hometown for "mutual destruction"? Which countries would tolerate such violence on their homeland? What have outside forces been doing here?

One unfortunate fact is that Hong Kong itself has failed to close a loophole in its system which left its door open to national security threats. Despite having reunified with our mother country for over 23 years, Hong Kong has failed to carry out its obligation under the Basic Law Article 23 to legislate to protect national security. This has created a vacuum. Certain external forces have exploited this vacuum to further their political gains at the expense of our national security and Hong Kong's interests. Some Hong Kong people colluded with these external forces and disgracefully called for sanctions against Hong Kong to crush the city's own interests. A foreign organisation admitted at the hearing of a congressional committee of its country that funds were deployed to assist Hong Kong rioters in evading investigation.

The CPG (Central People's Government) had no choice but to close this vacuum by enacting the Hong Kong National Security Law to stop the destruction and chaos of Hong Kong. The effect of the law is obvious and direct. Violence has dropped significantly. Advocacy of "Hong Kong independence" subsided. People arrested for offences in public order incidents have dropped by 50 per cent in five months. Stability and order have been restored. People have returned to their normal life. Business has resumed normal. Economy begins to recover. The financial market as the indicator for economic outlook is the first to pick up. Stock market capitalisation has reached an all-time high, up by 40 per cent. Daily turnover has increased even more, up by 130 per cent compared to a year ago. The city is steadily proceeding on the path of recovery and potential growth, notwithstanding the downward pressure from COVID-19.

The Hong Kong National Security Law stipulates only four types of offences of secession, subversion, terrorist activities and collusion to endanger national security to tackle the actual scenarios of national security threats that rocked Hong Kong in the period of disturbances and devastation. The four offences are in no comparison to the wide-ranging and prolific national security laws that exist in many countries. I must point out that the very first Article of the law states up front that its very purpose is to ensure the resolute, full and faithful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" policy. The Law has six chapters. Chapter I talks about the General Principles of the law. It has six articles. Three of these six are on protection of rights and freedoms. These include that rights and freedom shall be respected and protected as currently enjoyed by citizens under the Basic Law, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It stresses on the rule of law including presumption of innocence, right to defend, and no double jeopardy. In other words, half of Chapter I, the first and foremost chapter, focuses on and emphasises protection of rights and freedoms. This signifies how the law gives due regard to such protection. These are the fundamental principles a judge will take into consideration in any trial.

Another point I want to make very clear here is that the National Security Law makes no change to the Basic Law. The Basic Law confers Hong

Kong's independent judiciary, free from any interference. It gives immunity to judicial officers in the performance of their judicial functions. It confers the power of final adjudication in the Court of Final Appeal. Therefore, contrary to misguided perception, Hong Kong residents enjoy not just the same rights and freedoms that they have always been enjoying as enshrined in the Basic Law but also extra protection from national security threats which have rocked Hong Kong in the earlier long period of violence, chaos and harm to persons.

In Hong Kong, no person is above the law regardless of status, wealth, political power or background. The National Security Law is applied fairly. Enforcement actions and trials are based on facts and evidence. Judgments are made public with elaborate reasoning on decisions.

In fact, Hong Kong people have been enjoying more freedoms and rights now than before its reunification with China. At that time, the Governors were appointed by the British Government. Now the Chief Executive has to go through an election by a broadly representative Election Committee in accordance with the Basic Law. The Basic Law provides constitutional guarantee for fundamental rights and freedoms, and provides that the Legislative Council shall be constituted by election. Such constitutional protection did not exist before the reunification.

Now that stability and order have been restored, Hong Kong will proceed to prosper again as one of the world's international megacities. In addition, the National Five-Year Plan has laid down strong support for enhancing Hong Kong as an international financial, shipping and trade centre; developing its innovation and technology industry; and establishing it as an international legal and dispute resolution services centre in the Asia-Pacific region. Hong Kong is one of the 11 cities that form the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). The GBA has one of the highest industrial strengths in the region, a combined population of over 70 million and a rich ecosystem of start-ups. It houses a majority of China's most innovative technology companies. The GBA will be one of the key centres of growth in China. Hong Kong, as a highly open and international city, complements the strengths of the other 10 cities of the GBA. Markets, businesses, opportunities and potentials will be beyond limits.

Under the "One Country, Two systems", the CPG's supports for Hong Kong are all-rounded and wide-ranging. For example, in assisting Hong Kong to fight COVID-19, a big nucleic acid test support team was swiftly deployed from the Mainland to do testing for around 1.8 million residents in a matter of two weeks. And with the support of the CPG, Hong Kong quickly constructed a temporary hospital and a community treatment facility with altogether 1 800 beds, in which the Mainland bore the full cost. And despite the shortage of vaccines worldwide, with the support of the CPG and the country's health authorities, vaccines have promptly and smoothly arrived in Hong Kong about 10 days ago, helping Hong Kong kick-start the vaccination programme.

The "One Country, Two Systems" makes all these things possible and fast happening. With order restored by the Hong Kong National Security Law, and

the "One Country, Two Systems" fully ensured, increasing opportunities at all fronts will happen and grow in Hong Kong, especially those from the Mainland. I welcome you all to join us and fully capture them.

Thank you.

