

Speech by S for S on Hong Kong National Security Law at side event webinar at 48th session of UN Human Rights Council (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, on the Hong Kong National Security Law at a side event webinar at the 48th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) today (September 23):

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.

At the side webinar kindly hosted by the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China at the margin of the 46th session of UNHRC in March 2021, we shared with attendees the serious violence and riots faced by Hong Kong back in 2019 and 2020, and how the introduction of the Hong Kong National Security Law plugged the legal loophole in safeguarding national security. Six months have passed, and I am glad to report that things have continued to develop on a positive trend in Hong Kong, being back on the path of growth and prosperity – all thanks to the Hong Kong National Security Law and the improvement to our electoral system.

The recovery is evidenced by a drop in overall crime rate. In the first half of 2021, the total number of crimes decreased by around 5 per cent when compared to the same period of 2020. Crimes including arson, wounding and serious assault, as well as criminal damage have registered considerable drops ranging from 10 per cent to 40 per cent. In fact, Hong Kong reassumes top positions in indexes concerning law and order, indicating that Hong Kong remains one of the safest cities in the world.

And with stability comes prosperity. To name a few indicators, Hong Kong's GDP in the first half of 2021 increased by 7.8 per cent year-on-year; the average daily turnover of the stock market increased by 60 per cent for the first six months of 2021 when compared to the same period in 2020. The city continues to steadily progress from recovery to growth, notwithstanding the downward pressure from COVID-19. With stability restored, Hong Kong is once again well-positioned to make the best out of the opportunities brought by, and complements the strengths of, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which has a combined population of 86 million, and a combined GDP

of US\$1.7 trillion, featuring a rich ecosystem of start-ups and innovative technology companies.

But we must remain vigilant – the stability could be short-lived if we let our guard down, especially when local terrorism, which previously remained underground, has surfaced recently. On July 1 this year, which is the 24th anniversary of our return to our Motherland, a man stabbed a policeman in the busy street of Hong Kong and committed suicide afterwards. The attacker was believed to have been radicalised by numerous fake information posted in local media.

Following the attack, messages that honoured and paid tribute to the attacker and attempted to romanticise and glorify the despicable act with seditious intent to incite hatred in society were circulated online. The society was further disconcerted by a statement made by a student association of a local university, stating that the association was "grateful for [the attacker's] sacrifice".

In the same month, members of a terrorist group were arrested. Evidence showed that they were plotting to set bombs in public places (including courts and tunnels), illustrating the lingering national security threat which the HKSAR faces. It is fortunate that we now have the legal tool to sanction the acts advocating or promoting terrorism by virtue of the Hong Kong National Security Law as well as other local laws, to bring those criminals to face justice.

To the general public of Hong Kong, before the serious violence and riots in 2019, such scenarios would only show up in news reports on terrorist attacks in other countries, or in movie scenes. The threat is now real and it begs the question – why are all these happening now?

In the four decades or so before the violent riots, Hong Kong had been witnessing a steady decline in its crime figures. The encouraging trend, however, was disrupted and reversed by the serious violence and riots, with rioters preaching what they called "mutual destruction", to jump off the cliff with Hong Kong. Some shameless individuals even incited the young people "to break the law to achieve justice".

It is also ridiculous that some countries smear the Hong Kong National Security Law, or even ask the Hong Kong National Security Law to be abolished, when these very countries have their own national security laws, many more stringent or having a wider scope than the Hong Kong National Security Law. I could not find a better word than "double-standard" to describe these countries. Moreover, as I have elaborated above, we have to stay alert of the rekindling of national security risks that remains.

To look at the matter in greater depth, the emergence of the acts and activities endangering national security was fuelled by conspirators who managed to get their way into public offices through open elections. In recent years, these people made use of their status as public officers to obstruct or even paralyse the operation of the Government, and glorified the

violent acts of the rioters, trying to sway the public opinion to distrust the Government. Some even colluded with external forces to undermine both our country's and Hong Kong's security and interests. This chaos has exposed that there are indeed loopholes and deficiencies in Hong Kong's electoral system.

Hence, to truly achieve long-term stability and safety, not only the Hong Kong National Security Law has to continue to be in effect; the electoral system of the HKSAR must also be improved to uphold the principle of "one country, two systems" and fully implement the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong".

In this regard, in March 2021, with the authorisation of the National People's Congress (NPC), the Standing Committee of the NPC adopted the amended Annexes I and II to the Basic Law covering the method for the selection of the Chief Executive and the method for the formation of the Legislative Council respectively. The HKSAR Government subsequently gazetted the Improving Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Ordinance 2021, which was passed by the Legislative Council and came into effect in May.

At the same time, the Public Offices (Candidacy and Taking Up Offices) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2021 came into effect on May 21, which enhances the oath-taking requirement for public officers, including District Council members, as well as provides for the handling mechanism for breach of oaths. On top of all government officials and civil servants who have already pledged, the oath-taking by District Council members is now underway. The HKSAR Government will also gradually extend the oath-taking to officers of certain statutory bodies; let me make it clear that the oath only requires one's affirmation to uphold the Basic Law and swear allegiance to the HKSAR in accordance with the law, which any person holding a public position in Hong Kong could hardly dispute.

With the full implementation of the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong" and the Hong Kong National Security Law, the HKSAR Government is now well equipped to prevent and suppress acts endangering national security, focus our attention and energy to address Hong Kong people's concerns in the social, livelihood and economic fields, achieve good governance for the public good, and make best use of the opportunities in the Greater Bay Area so as to ensure the continued prosperity of Hong Kong.

I am sure that as long term stability and safety are achieved, even more opportunities await. Hence, I hope you will join me in supporting the Hong Kong National Security Law and the improvement of our electoral system, and together we shall explore and capture the vast opportunities ahead.

Thank you.

