

Speech by SLW at Hong Kong Myanmar Chamber of Commerce 6th Anniversary Dinner Banquet "Light Up Love" (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, at Hong Kong Myanmar Chamber of Commerce 6th Anniversary Dinner Banquet "Light Up Love" today (June 13):

Mr Albert Ung (Founding President of the Hong Kong Myanmar Chamber of Commerce), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening everyone. May I begin by saying how pleased I am to be here, to celebrate the sixth anniversary of the Hong Kong Myanmar Chamber of Commerce, and have the privilege of addressing a remarkable audience like your good selves – outstanding and successful businessmen and professionals.

Hong Kong is truly a cosmopolitan city and one of Asia's leading financial hubs. Despite our lack of natural resources, we are blessed with a diligent and productive workforce, both domestic and from abroad. Together they serve as the engine and powerhouse for our booming economy.

I have mentioned on many previous occasions, Hong Kong will soon face a major manpower shortage. In anticipation of a rapid surge in our ageing population within the next three to four decades, we expect to have a big proportion of workers nearing or reaching retirement age. With the acute shortage beginning to surface within the next 10 years, labour shortage presents a real and imminent challenge to us in the very near future.

Currently, we have around 393 000 foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) (Note 1) working in Hong Kong, representing some 10 per cent of the SAR's (Special Administrative Region's) total work force. I cannot emphasise more how FDHs are benefitting our local families, with services ranging from household chores, to the care of young children and elderly family members. Such much-needed service effectively relieves the burdens of many stay-at-home-moms, unleashing their work potential, to the benefit of Hong Kong's labour market and with it, our economic development.

With the soon-to-peak manpower supply and ageing population, it comes as no surprise that the demand for FDHs will continue to surge (Note 2). We could only hope that more domestic helpers could be coming our way from FDH-sending countries, Myanmar being one of them.

To make the SAR an attractive work destination, our Government is committed to safeguarding and protecting the rights and interests of FDHs. Hong Kong is one of the few places that grant FDHs statutory labour

protection that is on par with local workers. Among others, these include weekly rest days, statutory holidays, paid annual leave, sickness allowance, maternity protection, long service payment and severance payment. Additional protection and benefits are stipulated under the Government-prescribed Standard Employment Contract.

We were most delighted to learn from the Myanmarese Consulate-General in Hong Kong that their Government is contemplating plans to lift the export ban on domestic helpers working overseas, including Hong Kong. To expedite the process, the HKSAR Government is proactively following this up with the Consulate-General. And for this purpose, any advice and input the Hong Kong Myanmar Chamber of Commerce may have on this subject will be much appreciated.

On this note, I would like to wish the Hong Kong Myanmar Chamber of Commerce every success in the coming years. With concerted efforts of the local community, international business organisations, private sector and the Government, we can most certainly make Hong Kong a harmonious and inclusive society for all, and a better place to live and work.

Thank you very much.

Note 1: As at May 2019, there were 393 587 FDHs in Hong Kong. 85 were from Myanmar.

Note 2: According to the Hong Kong Population Projections 2015-2064 published by the Census and Statistics Department in September 2015, the number of FDHs was estimated to rise from 328 300 in 2014 to 629 300 in 2064.