

Speech by SLW at International Conference on “Social Welfare Policy, Practice, Research and Education: Public Engagement and Social Impact” (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, at the opening ceremony of the International Conference on "Social Welfare Policy, Practice, Research and Education: Public Engagement and Social Impact" organised by the Department of Social Work of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) this morning (October 18):

Professor Chiu Chi-yue (Dean of Social Science, CUHK), Professor Steven Ngai Sek-yum (Chairperson, Department of Social Work, CUHK), Professor Lam Ching-man (Chairperson of Conference Organising Committee), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning everyone. May I begin by saying how pleased I am to be here today, and have the opportunity to catch up with old friends, and to meet more new friends from overseas, sharing the same passion in social welfare.

Ever since I took up the appointment of Secretary for Labour and Welfare last July, overseeing labour and welfare policies has become my major responsibility. With this portfolio, I am tasked to safeguard the rights and benefits of employees, and the well-being of the underprivileged.

As those living in Hong Kong would know, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong announced her second Policy Address last Wednesday (October 10). Quite a significant portion of the address was dedicated to the betterment of social welfare in Hong Kong. Apart from those issues covered in the media most frequently, i.e. the extension of maternity leave and the abolishment of the offsetting mechanism between the Mandatory Provident Fund and severance payment or long service payment, there are numerous items included in the Policy Address and the Policy Agenda booklet. Because of the fact that the Policy Address is longer than 60 000 words, most people only rely on the media reports, which mainly cover the controversial issues. That is why our Chief Executive has asked people to read her policy address. I guess most academics do know that it is more reliable to refer to the original texts instead on relying on the media reports. I have to say that even reading the Policy Address and the Policy Agenda will not be enough. There would be more details about the various labour and welfare policy initiatives that you can find in the Legislative Council Panel papers.

Like everywhere else in the world, labour and welfare policies can be quite controversial. In the past week, I heard comments from both sides, i.e. some representatives from the business side are complaining that I am too

inclined to the labour side, while some others are complaining that I am too inclined towards the business side. Probably, this means that the Government position is just balanced and right.

These balanced positions are basically results of public engagement. By providing a platform for citizens and experts to engage in dialogues, divides can be bridged, and hopefully conflicting parties can meet halfway to have a win-win outcome. I believe that it is my job to weigh all the arguments, analyse them and decide on the right policy directions.

Of course, with the many pressing issues in labour and welfare, we still have a lot of work ahead of us. But taking note from the title of our Chief Executive's policy address, we will continue to "strive ahead and rekindle hope" for the citizens of Hong Kong. With the concerted efforts of the local community, academia, private sector and government, we can most certainly make Hong Kong a harmonious and inclusive society for all.

Last but not least, I wish the conference every success. The wisdom and knowledge of the participants will definitely inspire us to shape better social welfare policies, and make Hong Kong a better place to live in. Thank you.