

Transcript of remarks by CE at CE's Question and Answer Session

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Chief Executive's Question and Answer Session this morning (July 12):

Dr Hon Pierre Chan: Good morning. The Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health commissioned Hong Kong Baptist University to carry out laboratory tests on 13 e-cigarettes from October 2015 to February 2016. The tests found that the e-cigarettes contain harmful chemicals, which are associated with thyroid hormone disruption, reduction of fertility and affect foetal development. In addition, the Food and Health Bureau commissioned a survey of primary and secondary school students between November 2016 and last June, which found 29 380 teenagers had tried e-cigarettes, with 2 770 still using them. Among primary 4 to 6 pupils, 2 340 had tried vaping. Worryingly, e-cigarette advertising is directed mainly at young people. In recent years, we have also seen a huge increase in the number of people using emerging products, like heat-not-burn tobacco, as a substitute to conventional e-cigarettes. Do you have the resolve to follow the example of Macao and Singapore to enact a total ban on e-cigarettes?

Chief Executive: Thank you, Mr President. Well, first of all, let me assure Dr Chan that we agree with the medical profession that e-cigarettes and other new tobacco products, including these heat-not-burn products, they release toxic substances and are harmful to health. So, we don't have any difference as far as health protection is concerned, and that's why the Food and Health Bureau is proposing to strengthen regulation such that these products are being regulated, at least on par with the conventional cigarettes for the protection of public health. Right now, the Secretary for Food and Health is consulting the sector, listening to various views, and we hope to take into account these views and introduce amendments to the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance in the coming legislative session. But as far as a complete ban is concerned, Hong Kong does have to recognise her trade obligations in an international environment, because if conventional cigarettes are even more harmful, but they are allowed to be sold in Hong Kong under certain regulation, to go into a total ban of another form of tobacco product which is less harmful medically would raise many challenges, so we have to really strike a balance. But, as I said right now, the Secretary for Food and Health is consulting so you are welcome and all of you are welcome to provide us with your views and opinions on this subject.

Dr Hon Pierre Chan: The "less harmful" wording is wrong, there is no such thing-less harmful. It is harmful. And what are the factors and hurdles considered by the Government in not making such a decision of the banning? Does tobacco industry's interests outweigh public health and public interests?

Chief Executive: Definitely not. Definitely not. I have already mentioned the obligation under the global trade environment that we have to take into account. We certainly will not subject ourselves to any lobbying from the tobacco industry.

The Hon Claudia Mo: Talking of decency in this Legislative Council, really. Now, Liu Xia never committed one crime, but then she was found guilty by association because she is the wife and then the widow of Liu Xiaobo, China's Nobel Peace winner. She was persecuted. We all knew it. She was put under house arrest and went through all kinds of ordeals, and her persistent plight had prompted calls from the international community for her release, including Germany of course. She was finally released as an obvious political pawn, a diplomatic favour. Now, after all the outrages perpetrated, the hostage was released and our Mrs Carrie Lam had the cheek to actually call it, and I quote, "an expression of humanitarianism", unquote. Why did you make that statement on behalf of Hong Kong people, and exactly how and what do you mean?

Chief Executive: I meant what I said. Because you are very good at English, you should know that that particular phrase has no object, has no subject. So this is just a description of what I have seen. It is an act of humanitarianism.

The Hon Claudia Mo: ... bandying with words.

Chief Executive: Well, I have nothing more to add. Mr President.

The Hon Claudia Mo: Not too long ago, Carrie Lam told the Financial Times of London that she wouldn't mind being called a Beijing shoe-shiner. Are you indeed a Beijing groveler?

Chief Executive: In her usual style Ms Mo has taken that comment out of context. I was asked in that Financial Times interview, could I name one leader of the world that I admired. I said yes, even running the risk of being accused of shoe-shining President Xi, I said President Xi Jinping is one of the world leaders, or is the world leader, that I respected and admired most.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)