

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session this morning (December 30) to review the work in 2021:

Reporter: Good morning, Mrs Lam. Two questions. The FCC (Foreign Correspondents' Club) and the EU's external affairs division called the Police action against Stand News "a further blow to press freedom in Hong Kong". What's your take on that? And second one, what do you make of their comments that the Police action will continue to chill the media environment in the city? Thank you.

Chief Executive: As I have responded to a question in Cantonese, as usual I will not comment on the details of a case undertaken by a law enforcement agency, especially one which will shortly go into the judicial proceedings. I'm not going to comment on the case but I would outline, in response to your questions, a couple of principles, and these are very important principles that I have repeatedly mentioned in response to similar concerns in the past two years.

One is Hong Kong is very proud of being a place where there is strong rule of law, and this underlines Hong Kong's success as an international financial and business centre. As a place which is proud of the rule of law, of course we have to use legislation where there are obvious breaches, offences under the relevant legislation. What the law enforcement agencies have done, including the Police, in arresting people who are suspicious of committing offences under the Crimes Ordinance or the National Security Law, is their legitimate duty. They are doing this in accordance with the law, with the evidence they have collated and the investigations that they have done and I believe also with some legal advice.

Following the Police investigation, the case will then be passed to the Department of Justice to decide in an independent way whether prosecutions should be laid, and ultimately the case, the prosecution will go to the courts, and we all understand and appreciate that there is judicial independence in Hong Kong and the judges will decide on the cases in an independent manner without any interference, simply based on the law and based on the evidence put in front of them. These actions are law enforcement actions. These actions have nothing to do with so-called suppression of press freedom or suppression of democracy, as some will put it. I would say that nobody should associate law enforcement actions by the Police department with the freedom of the press.

I just read something. There was a statement issued by the Secretary of State of the United States and again they, sort of, made all sorts of allegations and accusations about this incident. There was this very short

phrase in the statement, it said that "Journalism is not sedition." Well I agree with that – journalism is not sedition. But seditious acts and activities and inciting other people through public acts and activities could not be condoned under the guise of news reporting. It should be very clear what is reporting of news, and what is seditious acts or activities to undermine national security.

That was my response to the recent incident, and I believe that people by now should realise that it is so very important to adhere to the rule of law in Hong Kong, to make sure that offences are being taken very seriously because we have all suffered as a result of a lot of non-law-abiding activities in the latter half of 2019 and nobody in Hong Kong want to see that happening again. Thank you.

Reporter: Mrs Lam, over the past year, opposition figures were arrested under the National Security Law, civil groups disbanded one after another, there was a new electoral system implemented in Hong Kong, and some Hong Kong people also left Hong Kong to other countries. How would you assess Hong Kong being a better place to live in and work now when compared to 2017 when you first took office? And, secondly, you also said in your PowerPoint just now that you will begin a public consultation on Article 23. How likely do you think the law can be passed before your term ends? Thank you.

Chief Executive: If you ask me, I think Hong Kong in 2021 is now in a much better state than when I took office in July 2017. One, fundamentally, is because we are now back on the right track of "One Country, Two Systems". And "One Country, Two Systems" being on the right track requires upholding the principle of "One Country", requires Hong Kong to safeguard national security, requires that a very important part of the political system, that is the Legislative Council (LegCo), comprises people who are patriotic. We're not suggesting that they could not criticise the Government or hold a different opinion on many of the things that we will put to LegCo, but they have to be patriotic. If members of the Legislative Council were not patriotic, they could use that occasion and furthermore to collude with foreign forces to subvert the Government of the Hong Kong SAR and the Central People's Government. So I think on that particular score, Hong Kong is now a much safer place, and I believe that with the support of the Central People's Government in all respects, particularly in integration with the Mainland development, in the 14th Five-Year Plan, in the Greater Bay Area, there are abundant opportunities in front of us for us to seize, which will help to improve Hong Kong's economy and improve people's livelihood. That is a very simple way to answer your question.

About enacting local legislation under Basic Law (BL) Article 23, this is our constitutional duty. We have not done it for over two decades. It is time that we should do it, because while the National Security Law has been promulgated, implemented in Hong Kong for one and a half years, there are still other offences relating to national security that require a new local legislation. What I have said, of course in consultation with the Secretary for Security, who is doing all the preparatory work, is to commence the public consultation within my term, and that is in the next six months we

will start the consultation, laying out the details of the proposed amendments to the legislation and so on. I am not very optimistic that we could actually pass the law because that would require completing everything, that is public consultation, drafting of the bill, presenting the bill to Legislative Council, the setting up of the Bills Committee and the Bills Committee scrutinising the bill and maybe even conducting their own consultations and then clause-by-clause examination, and then second reading and third reading. Looking at the calendar and calculating the sittings, I just don't see how that could be accomplished. But I have heard some LegCo members-elect expressing the desire that they will co-operate in order to expedite the passing of the legislation. I certainly welcome that, but I would still adhere importance to a more thorough discussion in society before we enact the law. Let's see how we interact with the new Legislative Council to see how quickly we could put BL 23 into our law books. Thank you.

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