

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (October 26):

Reporter: Good morning Mrs Lam. Amnesty International has followed Human Rights Watch in leaving the city, citing the (National) Security Law crackdown. What's your response please?

Chief Executive: Since the enactment of the National Security Law, different associations and various individuals have explained or justified their actions on the basis of the National Security Law, but there is no way that one could prove that this is exactly the reason for their taking of such a decision. Similarly I could not comment on this explanation given by an organisation about its departure from Hong Kong. What I could say here is, under the Basic Law Article 27, the freedom of association, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of speech and so on, are being guaranteed. No organisations should be worried about their legitimate operations in Hong Kong, but it has to be done in accordance with the law.

When people try to allege and accuse the National Security Law for posing threats or intimidation on people, one should read very carefully the National Security Law, particularly the article which says that we would, at the same time, safeguard the rights and freedoms enjoyed by people under the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance and also the various clauses in the international covenants as applied to Hong Kong. The National Security Law's primary objective is not just to arrest people and punish people. It also has a very laudable objective to prevent and suppress. If there are individuals or organisations that have been using Hong Kong to spread news or to engage in activities that they are worried because these activities are sort of undermining the national security of Hong Kong, then of course they would need to be worried because the National Security Law is not just about arresting people who have committed a crime. It is also about trying to prevent and suppress the activities which will have that impact of undermining national security.

On the other hand, may I draw your attention to some facts? I said I could not comment on speculations or excuses, but I could show you the facts. The fact is, according to the latest survey by the Census and Statistics Department and Invest Hong Kong, as at June this year, the number of overseas and Mainland companies that have set up offices and headquarters in Hong Kong has not reduced, in fact it was another record-breaking number of over 9 000. And I could also show you the fact that some important legal organisations at regional or international level have also established offices in Hong Kong in a legal hub set up by the Department of Justice, and last week we had a very important world-wide maritime conference in Hong Kong. And the International

Chamber of Shipping, the first office outside of its headquarters, is set up in Hong Kong. These are the facts which will give you the confidence that the National Security Law has not prevented or horrified people from doing their legitimate businesses in Hong Kong.

Reporter: Mrs Lam, I have a question about Hong Kong's international reputation as a free and open city. Of course, just now you mentioned there are some good achievements. I think no one would dispute that, but, because of the cross-border restrictions, many foreign business leaders including the CEO of the financial markets association said, going forward, Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre is increasingly at risk. And, also, at the same time the Government is launching this reform of the legal aid system and some people said it goes against the Basic Law's guarantee that people are free to choose their own representation. So I just want to ask you, especially because Hong Kong has a major achievement that you explained just now, going forward are you concerned that this situation could change for the worse? Thank you.

Chief Executive: A simple answer is, I'm not concerned. As you have realised, since the announcement of 2021 Policy Address on October 6, I've been speaking on many, many public occasions and taking various interviews of the media, and the recurring theme in what I have said on those occasions is I am full of confidence about Hong Kong's future, because, one, Hong Kong is back on the right track of "One Country, Two Systems". There need not to be the usual worries of Hong Kong becoming a gaping hole in national security. Secondly, we have an improved electoral system, which will return politicians or Legislative Council (LegCo) Members who are patriotic, so they will not do anything to endanger national security. They could still ask us to be accountable for the things we do, they could still refuse to support our policies and legislation, but ultimately all these are done in the best interests of Hong Kong. And, thirdly, one has seen how a more rational Legislative Council has managed to do a lot of good things for the people of Hong Kong, including some very important legislation, such as allowing non-locally trained doctors to come to Hong Kong in order to reduce the waiting time and to improve Hong Kong's healthcare system. All these are the basis of my confidence going forward, let alone the staunch support of the Central People's Government as reflected in the 14th Five-Year Plan, the Qianhai Plan, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Outline Development Plan. All these are very positive elements that any corporation, whether local, Mainland or overseas, will definitely take into account in deciding whether they want to set up an office or do business in Hong Kong.

Since you mentioned the legal aid review, which I understand will be discussed in the Legislative Council AJLS panel (Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services) meeting this afternoon, this review was prompted by me in answering a question in the Legislative Council in June this year. I am very appreciative of the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Director of Legal Aid for completing this exercise within a matter of a few months and coming up with a package of very sensible, pragmatic and balanced proposals, whether in offering criminal legal aid or civil legal aid, as well as legal aid in respect of judicial review cases. The review's objectives,

one, is to prevent the monopoly of legal aid cases by a small group of lawyers, barristers and solicitors together. Secondly, to enhance the case management of legally aided cases. And third, to enhance the transparency of the entire legal aid system. I don't think anybody would dispute these very good objectives and hence the package has been approved or endorsed by the Legal Aid Services Council, and I'm sure in this afternoon's LegCo panel meeting, it will also be very positively received by Members of the Legislative Council.

The last point about travel without restrictions. This is a very difficult subject. As I have explained on many occasions, we are caught in a sort of a dilemma because in order to resume some quarantine-free travel with the Mainland we have to ensure that our anti-COVID-19 practices are more in line with the Mainland practices, so that the Mainland authorities will have the level of confidence to enable Hong Kong people to go into the Mainland without being subject to the 14-day plus seven-day quarantine. And, in the anti-COVID-19 strategy, controlling the import of possible cases is a very important part of that strategy. If Hong Kong were to loosen the border controls for people arriving from overseas or adopt what other countries have done – so-called to live with the COVID-19 virus – then the chances of resuming travel with the Mainland will be reduced. This is a very simple hypothesis, and I can only say to those representing the financial sector that we have to look at it in context.

The context is Hong Kong's primary advantage lies in being the gateway to the Mainland of China. If businesses established in Hong Kong could not go into the Mainland, I think it will significantly reduce the attraction of Hong Kong as an international business hub and an international financial centre. At the moment, the Hong Kong SAR Government's strategy is to try to work very hard to resume some travel with the Mainland, especially for the business people. And if the global situation stabilises, if confirmed cases in the countries where people want to come to Hong Kong come down, then of course we will not put them in the Group A countries which are subject to 21 days of quarantine. They will come to Group B with 14-day quarantine after full vaccination, or, better still, maybe they could come down to Group C with only seven-day quarantine, which I understand will sort of provide much relief to the financial sector. But the current situation is we have not yet reached that stage, whether locally, with the Mainland or globally.

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