

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting this morning (October 8):

Reporter: So you said just now that over the weekend the anti-mask law didn't work, how will the Government tweak how the Police is going to enforce it because a fellow reporter said some reporters who were working with a press vest on, with a press pass on, were forced to remove their masks, actually the Police removed their masks after tear gas was deployed? Do you think this is the correct way to enforce the law? And also, you said that you were not – you have no immediate plans to invoke the ERO again to make new laws but can you tell us what circumstances would prompt you to introduce more laws under the ERO? Thirdly, can you verify reports that you are not going to be at LegCo to deliver the Policy Address on October 16? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you, there are a few questions. First of all, it is too early to say that the anti-mask law is not effective. I am sure you will agree that for any new policy or new legislation, it would take time for it to be effectively implemented. Please allow me to reiterate that if we are so proud of Hong Kong being a city that upholds and safeguards the rule of law, one important component of the rule of law is a law-abiding population. We need the people of Hong Kong to respect the law, so if a piece of legislation has been enacted, but people refuse to abide by the law, then we have a problem at hand. I would appeal to the common sense and rationality of the Hong Kong people that this is the time to observe the law. In enforcing this new piece of legislation, there will be some complications and misunderstandings, especially when the anti-mask law has provided for some legitimate defences and exemptions for certain categories of people to continue to wear a mask for various purposes – for medical and health purposes, for religious purposes and also for news reporting purposes. Amongst the various categories, because journalists are very much in the front line reporting on the confrontations, we have to have a better understanding to find a way that could strike the needed balance between respecting the rights of journalists to report on the scene, but at the same time allowing the Police to enforce the law. If there are any particular concerns, I will ask my colleagues, not only the Police, but maybe even the Information Services Department, to come in, to see whether we could find a better way to achieve that objective.

About whether we have other plans and what will be the prerequisites before further plans are implemented to invoke the ERO, the only prerequisite, or the only condition, is to achieve the objective of ending violence and restore law and order in Hong Kong. Of course that is a matter

of degree, so when we would judge that we need to invoke the ERO is not something that I can say categorically now because we are faced with such a changing situation, except to impress upon you all that this is not an easy decision. It is actually a very difficult decision because of the resistance, because of the enforcement concerns and because of perception. What I can assure you is the Government will take a very serious view and very careful assessment before the ERO is to be invoked again. By the way, as you will appreciate, we do have a judicial review to tackle later this month. Meanwhile, the court has ruled in our favour, twice over the weekend, that they have declined an application for an interim injunction. So at this point in time this anti-mask law is still valid and in effect.

Finally, about my plans for the 2019 Policy Address, the answer to your question perhaps does not lie with me. I am now reaching the final stage of completing my Policy Address, which again is a very difficult process because I have been fully occupied in managing the situation and my colleagues have also been likewise preoccupied, so this Policy Address will not be the usual type of Policy Address that will be very elaborate, very comprehensive, covering almost every aspect of the Government. I'm getting it ready for announcement on October 16. Whether I could do it in a normal fashion, that is walking into the LegCo Chamber to read it out maybe for an hour, an hour or so, is not something that I could determine on my own because it depends on the reception in the Legislative Council, especially among some non-establishment members, and also what will happen outside of the LegCo building. We have to monitor the situation and to plan for some alternatives to get that Policy Address out in the public domain.

Reporter: I have two questions for you. I'll start with the first one. You said that the face mask ban is not a failure, it needs time to be effective. In your opening statement, you do acknowledge that there has been serious and rampant violence across Hong Kong over the weekend. So what is it going to take, and how bad does it need to get in Hong Kong, before you make that decision to call on China to help restore order in the territory? And my second question is last week while you were in Beijing to mark National Day, did you meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping, and if so, what did you discuss?

Chief Executive: Second question first. I led the delegation to Beijing to celebrate the 70th anniversary. This year it was a particularly big delegation because last year I did request the leaders to give us a larger size delegation, so I felt obliged to lead the delegation. But then my stay in Beijing was very brief – it was less than 20 hours – so I can tell you categorically that I did not meet any Central Government officials to talk about business. Of course, when we were watching the parade, there were some officials passing by and we did a little bit of greeting, but definitely no, no such discussions, interactions, have taken place.

On your first question, it takes time for this new piece of legislation to ban the use of masks to have some effect. We will have to closely monitor the situation. I cannot tell you categorically now under what circumstances that we will do extra things including your enquiry about calling on the

Central Government to help, which of course is provided for under the Basic Law. At this point in time, I still strongly feel that we should find the solutions ourselves. That is also the position of the Central Government, that Hong Kong should tackle the problem on her own. But if the situation becomes so bad, then no options could be ruled out, if we want Hong Kong to, at least, to have another chance. But at this moment, I and my team are still very committed to making sure that we can use our own instruments, legal instruments, political instruments like continuing dialogue, policy instruments like addressing some of the deep-seated problems on the livelihood and economy side, to try to restore calm and order in Hong Kong. I would appeal to everyone in society to join hands to achieve this objective. Thank you very much.

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