

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 with the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan today (March 10):

Reporter: Hi, Mrs Lam and Financial Secretary. I have three questions. You mentioned the number of cases are on the rise in Europe and internationally. Can you confirm that you have reached out to the consul generals of Italy and India or other countries that we will be imposing further travel restrictions on these countries? And secondly, you've also mentioned that businesses should start to resume in Hong Kong. Could we also clarify, does that also mean you are going to relax the travel restrictions against Mainland China? Does that mean some of the ports will be re-opened or relax some of the previous restrictions? If not now, when? My final question concerns this, directed to the Financial Secretary, how would you describe the fluctuations of performance of the US market in the past few days and is it only a short term or long term? Is it a longer-term effect, given the coronavirus outbreak? Would you be looking to adjust some of the economic forecasts, given the epidemic would last relatively longer? Is there other specific tax cut or relief we can look forward to? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you, I'll answer the first two questions. First is Hong Kong is an international city and an aviation hub. That's why in the last two months or so we have been keeping the consular community informed of the strategy, of the measures that we have been taking so that when the time comes then they know the background. This is a general type of briefing we have done at least twice. I personally did one and the Chief Secretary for Administration did one, attended by almost all the members of the consular community and I have also written to them and sent them my first-month report on our anti-epidemic work. That is the general type of reaching out that you have referred to. The more specific type of contact happens when we have, after full deliberations of the various factors that I have outlined in Cantonese, i.e. the number of cases confirmed in that particular country or area, the speed of the number of cases surge; thirdly is the frequency of Hong Kong people travelling to that particular country and finally is the measure taken by that respective authority in controlling the spread of the virus, having taken into account all these factors, if the Hong Kong SAR Government has decided to introduce some measures, whether it is in putting that country or area under a Red Outbound Travel Alert or impose port health requirements or quarantine requirements on arrivals from that country or region or, even more drastically, to restrict the entry of arrivals from that country, then as a matter of respect and courtesy, we will reach out to that particular consul general. That's exactly what we are doing today so that we could make the announcement within today because the last thing is for the

consul general to hear it from a press conference without being told in advance. That is the sort of reaching out in response to your question.

The second question is, when I mentioned that operation of government services and businesses and generally the operation of Hong Kong city has to resume gradually and orderly is because everybody is now saying that this epidemic will last long. I'm sure everyone will agree that we cannot put a halt to the normal business and livelihood for too long. That doesn't mean that we will relax the restrictions, in the same way that when we go back to work it doesn't mean that we are not doing social distancing. Quite on the contrary, we are being even more vigilant in ensuring social distancing, in ensuring personal hygiene, in appealing to colleagues to wash their hands more frequently, to wear a mask properly as and when necessary and so on. For the time being, because of the uncertainty in the global situation, there are no plans yet to loosen any of the measures that we have put in place, but this situation has to be reviewed almost on a daily basis. I can update you whenever changes are made, but for the time being we are imposing more restrictions in light of the global epidemic situation.

Financial Secretary: As regards the US stock market, it had been very volatile in the past week. Its further development will depend on a number of factors. The outbreak of the coronavirus, the drop in oil prices are relevant factors. But on the other hand, their own domestic economic and political situation are also relevant. For us in Hong Kong, being a small and open economy, we have to be vigilant and monitor the situation very closely. I think the first and foremost task at the moment is to roll out the various measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund as well as measures in the Budget. As to the economic forecast and whether further measures are required, we will keep an open mind and monitor the situation closely and to look at the impact of the various measures first. Thank you.

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