

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 today (June 16):

Reporter: Hello, about the ban on public gatherings, you said that chances are that the ban may be relaxed but not lifted. Could you explain in English why, taking into account that the COVID-19 situation has stabilised? And second question about the central official saying the government in Mainland will have the jurisdiction in most serious national security cases, you said that you can't comment on the specifics now but how can you reassure Hong Kong people that our independent judiciary power will not be undermined, and that including the final adjudication? And lastly about the proposed "referendum", your administration has criticised this "referendum" to see if there will be a strike over the national security laws, but some organisers said the right to strike is actually ensured by the Basic Law and they questioned if your government has violated provisions related to protection against anti-union discrimination. How do you make of their criticism? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, the question about Cap.599G on prohibiting group gatherings. It applies to all sorts of group gatherings of a certain number of persons. It is not targeting a particular type of group gatherings. At the moment, we are prohibiting gatherings of more than eight persons, with some exceptions, for example provided under other regulations for religious gatherings and things like that. We really need to take into account the several factors that I have been explaining on this occasion in the last four months. This sort of social distancing measure is very significant and very relevant in any anti-epidemic work but we have to strike a balance between at least three main factors. One is the public health concerns. Secondly is the economy, the impact on the economy. Thirdly is the acceptance – or I would now call the tolerance – of the people because if you continue to keep these measures in place people become intolerant, so they will not comply with these regulations. At every stage of looking into this subject of group gathering we are trying to find a balance amongst the three factors.

As far as the current situation is concerned, I would say that the public health, or the epidemic situation is rather stable but that doesn't mean that we need not be vigilant. You have seen other cities that have gone for some re-opening, relaxation and then they see a re-emergence of COVID-19 cases. The direction at this point in time, taking into account the impact on the economy and the people's acceptance, I would say is relaxation, but relaxing how far is not an exact science. It is something that we need to deliberate. I can say that we have fully deliberated and we are now seeking

endorsement from the Executive Council because that particular regulation has to be authorised by the Chief Executive in Council.

About comments made by the Deputy Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office yesterday on an occasion to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law, without the details about the provisions in the legislation and how they are going to be applied, it is not possible for me, and not appropriate, because I am not party to the law-making institution, to comment on the individual comments made by my Mainland counterparts, except to reiterate the very important principles guiding this law-making process. They are laid down in the explanatory statement to the draft Decision discussed by the National People's Congress leading to the approval on May 28. Included in the five main principles are the principles to ensure that there is full compliance with this very important principle of "One Country, Two Systems", that everything has to be done in accordance with the law and the legitimate rights and freedoms of the Hong Kong people are being safeguarded and protected. And I noticed that subsequent to that explanatory statement, the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office issued on May 29 another statement elaborating on this important principles and on top of that reiterated that this new piece of legislation will not change Hong Kong's high degree autonomy and will not affect judicial independence, including that of final adjudication.

As far as this proposed "referendum", there is no such thing as a "referendum" in Hong Kong or in our political process. Your question is about whether strikes are legitimate and protected under the constitutional provisions of Basic Law. I think one has to look at the purpose of the strike. If the purpose of a strike has nothing to do whatsoever with the workplace, with being members of a union in voicing their concerns against the employers and so on, then it will not be covered by that sort of constitutional protection. Thank you.

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