

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 (August 18):

Reporter: Question number one, do you actually have a concrete plan in saving the businesses or restaurants to make sure that they can survive now that the social distancing measures are extended for another week as many of them have said they're now on life support and they cannot survive any longer? And how soon in your opinion that the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) 3.0 can be rolled out? And also a question about sanctions from the United States. How are you going to promote Hong Kong to US businesses or even other overseas business if you are not welcome overseas? How should the international community see Hong Kong as a whole when its leader or other officials are not welcome there? And also about the new recruits, you mentioned that new recruits who are arrested or charged will have their contracts terminated. Why are you only targeting people arrested in illegal public activities rather than other offences like theft? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you for the three questions. First is, we are still in a very severe situation as far as the COVID-19 epidemic is concerned. There are several indicators which do not give us that sense of comfort, that this is a time for relaxation of these social distancing measures. One is we have not seen a downward trend yet. Yes, the number of cases has reduced to two digits instead of three digits half a month ago but they are still fluctuating from one day to another day. Second is we are seeing some worrying clusters emerging. One is at the container port involving maybe thousands of workers, the other is in the dorms resided by the foreign domestic helpers when they are changing jobs while in Hong Kong. Third is our testing has not been conducted as comprehensively or as speedily as we would like to see. So with these factors, it is simply not possible to do significant relaxation, and also by the same token, it would be very difficult for me as the Chief Executive to give you a plan on when the epidemic will go away. I don't think any leaders of any governments including the World Health Organization could do that sort of projection. In fact, the more common way of saying it: until an effective vaccine is discovered and produced and widely applied, we probably will have to live with this virus for a pretty long time under what we call "new normal" circumstances.

Now many industries are hard hit by this epidemic, especially those providing hospitality, catering, tourism and personal services because of the social distancing measures, and the 16 000 eatery outlets in Hong Kong are amongst the hard hit sectors. That's why in AEF 1.0 and 2.0 we always have an item for the catering industry, and this has been welcomed by the sector when the particular measures were introduced. We will engage the sector and try to

come up with measures that we would provide them with more relief, so that we could all preserve our capacity and wait for the economy to come back.

When will the AEF 3.0 be rolled out? On the last two occasions – as an indicator, I wouldn't say this is a commitment – we took about three weeks from announcement to funding approval by the Finance Committee. I understand that the Legislative Council President and the Chairman of the House Committee have decided to convene a special meeting of the House Committee on August 28 to discuss our anti-epidemic work. That will be about 10 days from now, so hopefully we will be able to present some proposals for discussion and thereafter take the case to the Finance Committee for approval because there is no way that we could meet those additional requirements from the contingency that I used to tell you. There used to be a contingency within the AEF 2.0, but that contingency has also been more or less exhausted over the last few weeks.

Now, sanctions- these sanctions are totally unjustified and we will take up some of those sanctions, especially those involving trade, because Hong Kong is a separate member of the World Trade Organization, to be mistreated by another member of the World Trade Organization breaches the rules and regulations of this international body, so we will take up with the World Trade Organization against those sanctions. But your question's focus seems to be on myself – If I'm being sanctioned by America, I couldn't go to the US, how could I do overseas promotion? To be very honest with you, since taking office in 2017, I have not been to the United States. I had been planning, but I have not been to there, partly is because in 2016, as the Chief Secretary, I have done a very extensive US official trip covering three cities of San Francisco, New York and Washington DC. Now, without a physical visit by the leader of the Government doesn't mean that we could not do overseas promotion work. We still have three Economic and Trade Offices in America and we have our Invest Hong Kong arms which would be very happy to introduce Hong Kong's strengths, especially in the Greater Bay Area, in the financial services to US companies interested in setting up their business in Hong Kong, and we can also work through the chambers. I hope that in asking that question, you too will feel that the leader of this Government has been mistreated by the US administration. But that, never mind, as I said, despite some inconvenience in my personal affairs that is nothing that I will take to heart at all, we will continue to do what is right for the country and for Hong Kong.

Now, new recruits, i.e. the probationers. One is, civil servants are public officers and we have very high expectations of every member of the civil service. They have to, under the national security law, pledge allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and to uphold the Basic Law. They are subject to a more stringent set of standards and I would advise whoever wants to join the civil service of the HKSAR, they have to make sure that they can fulfil those requirements. In terms of management of the civil service, recruitment is important, so we bring in the right people. Second, their probation period is very important. We want to observe these civil servants to ensure that they meet the high standards that I have just described because once they move on to confirmation, our rules

and regulations make it very difficult for us to dismiss a permanent employment civil servant. This time round, the Civil Service Bureau has focused on the probationers, advising the heads of departments to make sure that they are monitoring and observing not only the performance of the probationers on the job but also their conduct, their other behaviours to make sure that they will be good enough to continue to serve the people of Hong Kong, being an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China.

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