

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (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 15):

Reporter: Good morning, Mrs Lam. Last week it emerged that 90 per cent of quarantine hotels are booked for the coming month. Will the Government put on more capacity so Hongkongers can return home? Second, the Equal Opportunities Commission urged people not to stigmatise the 2022 Gay Games. Would you condemn lawmakers for calling the Games "dirty, disgraceful and divisive" last week, and further will the Government actively intervene to support and embrace the Games, other than letting them hire venues off-peak? And finally the creative industry is concerned about the new guidelines that ban films deemed a national security risk. Can a movie really threaten the nation's security, and is there a risk that civil servants making these judgements will be overcautious and stifle the film industry?

Chief Executive: Well, of the three questions, first is about our quarantine arrangements. Yes, it is true that perhaps because of a larger number of Hong Kong students coming back from overseas, there is a greater demand for the quarantine hotels, and also in terms of the variety of hotels being put on the quarantine list. My colleague, particularly the Secretary for the Civil Service, is monitoring the situation very closely and liaising with hotels to see whether they are willing or interested, to join the Designated Quarantine Hotel Scheme. You have to realise that once a hotel agrees to put its name forward on the list they could not admit any other customers. They have to do their own assessment and calculation before they come forward to be included in the quarantine hotel list. We certainly will monitor very closely.

Second question is about the Gay Games. Our position on the Gay Games is we understand the purpose of these Games is to promote inclusiveness and diversity. We have no problem with that sort of spirit and purpose of the Games. And as usual we will provide the needed help in terms of the hire of government venues in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. This point has been made very clear by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Caspar Tsui, in answering a question on this subject in the Legislative Council. It was much regretted that in the course of discussing this question in the Legislative Council, that individual Members have become a bit emotional in expressing their view. After all, they are Legislative Council Members and they have their own standards they should abide by. I certainly, personally, and as the Chief Executive, do not condone that sort of remarks by individuals which will unnecessarily divide society and even raise hatred among certain sectors in the community.

About creative industry in general, Hong Kong upholds freedom of expression, and that's why we are very well positioned to be a cultural hub

and a creative city to the extent that in the nation's 14th Five-Year Plan, they have given Hong Kong the needed support to develop into a cultural hub, where the East meets the West. Your specific question was probably prompted by the guidelines issued by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development on the subject of film censorship. Now we have an ordinance in Hong Kong called the Film Censorship Ordinance and we have a department, the OFNAA (Office for Film, Newspaper and Article Administration), which is responsible for administering this ordinance when films are presented to seek approval for screening in Hong Kong. They have to decide whether that film is suitable for screening and they have to give it the necessary classification. Previously there wasn't a very clear condition or requirement about national security, but we cannot take for granted that there is a piece of legislation called the Hong Kong National Security Law and it was not being fully implemented.

Apart from enforcing this piece of national and Hong Kong legislation to deal with the four types of offences that undermine national security, there are several very relevant provisions or articles in the National Security Law that require almost every department, every individual, every organisation not to do things that will undermine national security and harm the interests of the nation including subverting the Government of the Central Authorities and also the Hong Kong SAR Government. I support the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development in updating the guidelines for censors to build in this condition. Otherwise, my censor colleagues, they are all civil servants, will not be alerted to this requirement in discharging their duty, which is very unhelpful. The SCED has acted in accordance with the law in discharging his duty in respect of the Film Censorship Ordinance. I did admit that it has perhaps caused some anxiety amongst the film industry practitioners and also from the member representing the cultural sector, that is the Honourable Ma Fung-kwok. I spoke to Secretary Edward Yau, and he will engage the industry practitioners to assure them of what we are talking about in terms of not undermining national security.

One has to accept that rights and freedoms, including the freedom of expression, are not without restrictions. The court has ruled on many, many occasions that at the end of the day, some of these individual rights and freedoms have to be restrained by law in order to have a civilised society, in order to have a safe city. It is a matter of striking the needed balance between respecting creative freedom on the one hand, and safeguarding national security and safety of Hong Kong on the other hand. I can respond in the sense that the Secretary will discuss with the industry to allay their concerns and anxiety.

Thank you.

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