

Transcript of remarks by SLW on Booking System for Foreign Domestic Helpers and HKCTU's training courses

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on the temporary suspension of the Booking System for Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDHs) of the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre and training courses provided by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) after attending a radio programme this morning (September 18):

Reporter: Secretary, regarding Penny's Bay, how long will that service be stopped? Can you explain in English why opening more quotas would not be feasible, but may even be a bad thing? Second, regarding HKCTU, will these retraining courses be bound to end with HKCTU's disbandment? Would workers and employees become a victim?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: As regards the number of rooms in the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre, we consider the existing number, i.e. 50 FDHs per day, an optimal arrangement. If we are to increase that number significantly, such as to a hundred or so, we are running the risk of high infection among people coming in and subsequently we may have to suspend the flights from Manila. Currently, we only have three flight operators from Manila and one of them is still under suspension now. If we increase the number of people coming in and then unfortunately we have high infection rates on arrival, then all these flights will be suspended. That basically means there will be none coming in. So, if we want to increase the quota, the end result is actually reducing the number of FDHs who may be able to come. That will not be a constructive way.

We definitely have to look at the development of the epidemic, the situation of FDHs flying in, the infection control measures and the infection rates, etc. I cannot say when we will be able to reopen the reservation for the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre, but I will say definitely we need at least a week's time to look at the run-in of the facilities for this particular purpose. I hope people will understand that, within roughly just a month's time, we basically have opened an 800-room "hotel" for operation (through co-operation) by government departments together and that is a real challenge.

We will try our very best to have all the procedures and logistics arranged smoothly, but I would expect some hiccups, which are almost inevitable in the whole process. This is something really new. The Government has never run a hotel before and that is a real challenge to our department colleagues. I do actually appreciate the efforts they have made in such a short notice, making such a facility to run almost like a hotel. We will see how we can improve the process.

Reporter: How about the HKCTU?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: As for the HKCTU, it is not a trade union registered under the Trade Unions Ordinance. But because it is one of the largest service providers to our employees retraining programmes, our Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has been looking into this possibility that the HKCTU may close. Therefore, a number of training courses running for the ERB would be affected. So, starting from a couple of days ago, the ERB has already been looking into this matter, seeing what are the possibilities and ways to try to reduce the impact on trainees as far as possible, such as whether they can speed up the training programmes so that they can end quickly before the possible winding-up, and if it is not possible, whether other training bodies can come onboard to help complete or take over the training. These are the things the ERB has already been looking into.

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