

Government expresses regret over US State Department decision to terminate exchange visits

A US State Department decision to terminate visits to Hong Kong under a long-standing programme is short-sighted and premised on false assumptions, a HKSAR Government spokesman said today (December 5).

"The Hong Kong Cultural and Exchange Programme has been running for many years and has provided valuable opportunities for US Congressional staffers to gain first-hand insight into Hong Kong's development and issues of mutual interest," the spokesman said.

"At the same time, these visits also provided Hong Kong officials with the opportunity to better understand the thinking and concerns of US administrations over the years and to engage in frank exchanges on the basis of mutual respect.

"The feedback we have received from our guests under this programme has been quite positive and it is a pity that the State Department has forfeited this opportunity for dialogue at a time when it is most needed."

The spokesman pointed out that the Hong Kong exchange programme had always been the responsibility of, and funded solely by, the HKSAR Government and resisted strongly false claims made by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The spokesman said that visit itineraries and meetings under the Hong Kong programme were discussed and agreed with guests prior to their arrival in Hong Kong and always included areas of interest raised by the visiting delegation members.

Visiting delegations were free to meet with whom they pleased outside of the agreed itinerary while in Hong Kong, and often did. It is thus simply flawed to say that the Hong Kong visits are carefully curated for propaganda effect, the spokesman said.

"This is yet another of those unilateral and illfully motivated decisions taken by the US administration that not only undermine long-standing co-operation and engagement but also close the door on dialogue for the sake of political diatribe."

The spokesman said that the HKSARG through its Economic and Trade Offices in Washington D.C, New York and San Francisco would continue to engage a wide range of contacts to explain Hong Kong's position and refute any misrepresentation.