

HKSAR Government welcomes joint statement by pro-development camp

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government today (August 10) welcomes the joint statement signed by the pro-development camp on appealing to the community to work together to engineer changes in Hong Kong for a better tomorrow.

A Government spokesman stressed that at a time when Hong Kong was facing the great challenges brought about by the social unrest and COVID-19 which had plagued Hong Kong in the past year, all people in Hong Kong should discard their differences and work together with one heart to fight against the virus and to help Hong Kong tide over the difficulties so that the city can start afresh for a new future.

The spokesman said the COVID-19 epidemic in Hong Kong remained severe. The Government had been putting in place the most stringent measures to tackle the epidemic since January.

"To enhance Hong Kong's virus testing capability and increase its medical facilities as fast as possible, the HKSAR Government has earlier sought the help of the Central Government with a view to assisting Hong Kong to strengthen its testing capability and build temporary treatment facilities. The Central Government is very supportive of HKSAR and has acceded to its request swiftly and proactively. The HKSAR Government once again expressed its gratitude to the care and support rendered to HKSAR by the Central Government.

"The Mainland nucleic acid testing support team, which was formed in response to the request of the HKSAR Government, has commenced work gradually to help strengthen Hong Kong's virus testing capacity. The Government has also sought the assistance of the Central Government in making arrangements for the Mainland's shelter hospital team to share its experience with the government's engineering departments and the Hospital Authority and to provide professional advice and suggestions for the setting up of treatment facilities at the AsiaWorld-Expo, as well as in supplying related hospital beds and equipment including temporary negative air pressure treatment facilities. In addition, with the support of the Central Government, the HKSAR Government plans to build a temporary hospital on a piece of about 3.2 hectares of land next to the AsiaWorld-Expo. It will provide a negative pressure ward that can accommodate about 800 to 1 000 beds and related medical facilities.

"The HKSAR Government is actively pursuing the above work. We hope that the whole community, with the Central Government's support, can unite in fighting the virus so that Hong Kong people's daily life and economic activities can resume normal very soon," the spokesman said.

The spokesman said Hong Kong was facing an increasing threat to national security. At the same time, external elements have intensified their interference in Hong Kong's internal affairs. The National Security Law is enacted for ensuring the resolute, full and faithful implementation of the principles of "one country, two systems", "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong" and a high degree of autonomy. It seeks to prevent, suppress and impose punishments on acts and activities to split the country, subvert state power, organise and carry out terrorist activities, as well as collude with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security. The National Security Law only targets an extremely small minority of offenders, while the life and property as well as various legitimate basic rights and freedoms enjoyed by the vast majority of citizens are protected.

Safeguarding national security through legislation is in line with international practice. Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia have all enacted laws to safeguard national security and sovereignty, and formed relevant decision-making and enforcement bodies. This shows that every country has an obligation and relevant legislation to safeguard its national security and sovereignty.

The spokesman also pointed out that under the epidemic situation, Hong Kong's economic situation was worrying. After contracting by 9.1 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter, real GDP plunged further by nine per cent in the second quarter. Hong Kong has been seeing a new wave of the epidemic since July, affecting once again people's daily lives and economic activities. Against this backdrop, it is likely that Hong Kong's economy in the third quarter will be facing even greater pressure, and it may take longer than originally expected for the local economy to recover.

Faced with this extremely difficult economic situation, the Government has put in place relief measures of the largest scale ever, including one-off measures in the Budget and the two rounds of Anti-epidemic Fund, totalling some \$290 billion. All these measures, including the Enterprise Support Scheme that will last until end November, have been gradually implemented to provide support and relief to small and medium enterprises and citizens.

The spokesman said, "Though Hong Kong has been going through a trying time in the past year, our institutional strengths and core competitiveness are still intact. Under the "one country, two systems" arrangement, Hong Kong continues to be an international financial centre and one of the best places around the world for doing business. We have free flow of capital, goods, information and talents; simple and low tax regime, robust regulatory system, rule of law and judicial independence. We also play a unique and important role in China's national development strategies, in particular the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development and the Belt and Road Initiative. All these strengths are internationally recognised.

"With the implementation of the National Security Law, Hong Kong has not only quickly restored social and political stability, but is also poised for wider and greater development opportunities. With a more solid foundation for the 'one country, two systems' principle, Hong Kong could play an even more

positive role in the continuous opening-up and deepening of reform of our country."

The spokesman added, "The development of Hong Kong in the past few decades demonstrates that there emerges new opportunities in every crisis. As long as we could take advantage of our unique institutional strengths, rightly position ourselves in the development, maintain and enhance our own competitiveness and grasp the opportunities to participate in our country's development strategies, we could definitely serve our country's needs with our strengths, promote the further economic development in Hong Kong, and build a prosperous and stable Hong Kong."