

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session this afternoon (June 15):

Reporter: Mrs Lam. Is this really, as you suggest, about a misunderstanding? Are so many Hong Kong citizens really that easily confused? Or is this more about a problem that the people of Hong Kong deeply distrust the Central Government in Beijing, and many of them see your government as not really representing them, but representing the interests of the Central Government in Beijing? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, as you will notice, I have not used that term “misunderstanding”. I was saying that we have not done sufficiently to explain and allay fears and concerns. Of course it is difficult for me as the Chief Executive standing here to evaluate the causes of that resistance or fear or concerns about this bill. But I would confess, as I did in a statement on Wednesday, that in the past years or so we have seen this sort of situation where there’s major confrontation, and very often the issue that has given rise to that confrontation has a Mainland dimension. I’m sure you can name a few, and I can name a few. But no matter what, when there is that concern, that fear, I think everyone should be given an opportunity to increase their confidence, to allay their concerns, so that if it is a good thing for Hong Kong then we get it done. This is exactly what happened to the co-location legislation last year. We have a high-speed train, 26 kilometres, that is ready to go, but in order to achieve the effectiveness of a high-speed train in that sort of circumstances, we need co-location of the Mainland and Hong Kong CIQ (Customs, Immigration, Quarantine) facilities. That would necessitate Mainland law enforcement bodies to operate on Hong Kong territory. We went through a very elaborate process, a three-stage elaborate process, to allay the original concerns and fears about that sort of situation where Mainland officers could come down to Hong Kong to enforce the law. You could say that I originally also harboured that sort of wish, that through intensive discussion and explanation and legal safeguards we could overcome that concern and get this good thing done, because the purpose and intent of the legislative amendment has been accepted by many people. I’m sure BBC, because you are very international, you must have been reporting on a lot of anti-money laundering, anti-terrorist financing. That sort of legal assistance on a mutual basis between jurisdictions is extremely important.

On your second question about the position of the Chief Executive, again, if people have the perception about the Chief Executive’s institution – not Carrie Lam herself, but the institution of the Chief Executive – that he or she, being appointed by the Central People’s Government, will only obey the orders of the Central People’s Government, if that is the view then that is a view that does not sit well with the Basic Law – that’s not aligned with the constitutional role of the Chief Executive. Under the Basic Law the Chief Executive has dual accountability. She or he is responsible to the Central

People's Government, but at the same time responsible to the people of Hong Kong, and what is more important, that is in the Basic Law, every act of every person including the Government and the Chief Executive has to be lawful. Even in any sort of situation in a private enterprise, if your boss who pays your salary asks you to do something unlawful, you shouldn't do it, and you wouldn't do it. I hope that explains the relationship between the Chief Executive and the Central People's Government, and I have been adhering faithfully to that constitutional characteristics of this position of the Chief Executive.

Reporter: After all the intense and some would say unprecedented opposition and conflicts we've seen over the past week because of the extradition bill initiated by your government, do you think that you are still fit to govern the city as the Chief Executive? And will any government officials take the responsibility for this crisis and resign from their position? And secondly, hundreds of thousands of people took to the street asking your administration to withdraw the bill unconditionally. Do you really think that simply by suspending the bill, the people of Hong Kong could be pacified and do you think that suspending the bill will help restore people's confidence in the Government?

Chief Executive: About the first point, as I have repeatedly said and I hope people will appreciate, in doing this legislative exercise, myself and my colleagues were driven by our passion for Hong Kong. We want Hong Kong to do well. If Hong Kong's justice system and mutual legal assistance regime have some major deficiencies, it is our responsibility to rectify those deficiencies so that Hong Kong could do better when another situation arises. It is also driven by our empathy for the people of Hong Kong. We could easily ignore Mr and Mrs Poon – said sorry, we are very sorry about the death of your girl – but we have empathy for them. We just ask ourselves if the situation happens to my son, John Lee (the Secretary for Security)'s child, what will we do? This is what I call empathy. We have empathy for the people of Hong Kong. And this is not the only occasion as the Chief Executive that I displayed very strongly that empathy for individual people of Hong Kong. With that objective in mind, we have not done a good enough job to convince people and to ensure that this laudable objective could be met. But give us another chance, we will do this bill well if we, in our engagement of people, can get more diverse opinions, and if we can build broader consensus to do it, we'll do it. But we have other things to do. We have the economy to look after, we have livelihood issues to address. On the former especially we are expecting some downturn in Hong Kong's economy. That's where we will continue to perform and deliver for the people of Hong Kong.

The decision I made today is not as described as pacifying people or some people said restoring some of my damaged reputation. That's not the purpose. The purpose is very simple. People of Hong Kong want a relatively calm and peaceful environment and we did have that relatively calm and peaceful environment in the last two years since I took office. So this is the time, after what you describe as tension, conflicts and so on, for a responsible government, having looked at the situation and the circumstances, to restore as quickly as possible that calmness in society. That is my first

consideration. The second consideration is in any confrontations that I have seen on Wednesday, it is very possible that when it recurs again, there will be even more serious confrontations. The 80 or so injuries, generally minor injuries that we have seen, may be replaced by very serious injuries to my police colleagues and to ordinary citizens, whether they are very fierce protesters or just ordinary students joining a protest. I don't want any of those injuries to happen. Those are my considerations in announcing that we will pause and think and for the time being suspend and halt the legislative amendment process.

Reporter: The question I have for you is: What took so long, given that you knew what public opinion was after the protest last Sunday? Why did you wait so long to come to this decision, and are you nervous about the march planned for tomorrow? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Our decision has nothing to do with what may happen tomorrow. As I answered in another question, it has nothing to do with an intention, a wish, to pacify. Why take so long? Actually, if you remember what I said in my account, I acknowledge that last Sunday we had a large number of people coming out. It's very peaceful, generally orderly. This is part of Hong Kong – we do have that sort of protest from time to time. But it is on Wednesday that the polarization of views in society relating to this bill has given rise to violence, very serious confrontations, people being hurt, police on the ground being forced to take some of those measures. That's why I came to the view, I told myself that I need to do something decisively to address two issues: how could I restore as fast as possible the calm in society and how could I avoid any more law enforcement officers and ordinary citizens being injured. That was Wednesday to Saturday. Meanwhile, I met with people, because, as you know, in these sort of circumstances you have only one shot. I need to ask my advisors, I need to think through, our team has to deliberate it within ourselves, and this is my earliest opportunity. Although it is a Saturday, I did not wait until Monday to explain to you the deliberations leading to this decision. I hope you understand.

Reporter: So, what details did you give in the emergency meeting with Han Zheng in Shenzhen and what did you tell him? And can you explain why you didn't withdraw the bill but instead you suspend the bill? And also, why don't you step down now? Thanks.

Chief Executive: First of all, I could not comment on any meetings I have with anybody if it is not a public meeting. The Chief Executive has her own schedule every day, so I cannot confirm to you whether I have met a particular person during that day if it is not an official meeting that needs to be announced or publicised. If you're interested in the Central People's Government's position and whether they have been informed about my decision, the answer is yes. Since all along they have taken such an understanding, supportive approach towards this local exercise, which is entirely within Hong Kong's autonomy to do, I feel obliged to report to them that I have now considered all factors and I wish to announce today that we are making a change – we are suspending the legislative work in order to allow more time

for communications, explanation, listening of opinions, and then decide on the way forward. I can tell you that the Central People's Government adopts the same attitude. They understand, they have confidence in my judgement and they support me. As far as the difference between suspension and withdrawal, I have answered a few times. In very brief terms, it's because this legislative exercise has very well-intended objectives. One is to deal with the Taiwan case, the other is to rectify the deficiencies in our current regime to deal with mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, and also to allow surrender of fugitive offenders with about 170 other countries and territories without long-term agreement. I hope nobody disputes those two objectives. With those two objectives in mind, withdrawing the bill seems to suggest that even those two objectives were erroneous in the first place, and I cannot accept that, because I think they are the needed objectives. If I may just elaborate a bit, especially for the international audience, to rectify the deficiencies in our regime is something that we have always been asked by the international community to do. One of these international organisations is the Financial Action Task Force on anti-money laundering, comprising the G7 countries, based in Paris. Hong Kong is a member in the name of Hong Kong, China. We are a member, amongst I think 37 members of this group, the FATF. The FATF came to look at our situation and said by and large we're doing well on various aspects, but there is this aspect which we ranked very low – it's because you have no extradition arrangement, no mutual legal assistance in criminal matters with the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan – they said you better do it as a matter of priority. That was on our agenda anyway – we have to do something. So at least now I can say I've made an attempt, I will tell the FATF next time they come I have made an attempt, somehow we could not deliver it yet, but we will try it again if circumstances permit. The difference between suspension and withdrawal could be explained in that context.

As far as myself and my team, we will continue to work very diligently and hopefully to achieve the same effect that we have seen since July 1, 2017, that generally society is more peaceful, there's less tension, people are focusing on the economy and livelihood matters. Although I would say that even on livelihood matters, especially housing, we have not been doing the best we could to meet people's aspirations, we will continue to work very hard.

Reporter: This bill has spread fear and sparked some of the worst violent protests on this city's streets since the handover. Are you going to apologise to the people for the damage that you and this bill has caused?

Chief Executive: I have repeatedly said in my opening statement and also in response to some questions that this bill has very laudable objectives, not only domestically but also internationally. The enactment of this bill will help to raise Hong Kong's international profile and also demonstrate that we are a place with excellent rule of law, not only for our own citizens but also in contribution to the combatting of serious crime on a cross-border and transnational basis. With those very laudable objectives, I confess that we have not been as effective as we would like to communicate with the people to justify these very good objectives that are worth doing. And at the same time

there are other factors and other circumstances that have given rise to some anxiety and fear and concern. So the best way forward is to pause and think and to find opportunities and time to see whether we could still reach those good objectives as laid down in the bill. That is the approach that I have taken.

Reporter: Thank you very much, Chief Executive. Where we were in the protests on Wednesday, we saw excessive police force being used. Someone right next to our team was actually hit in the head, it seemed that the Police were actually targeting protesters in the head and in the torso. Organisers for tomorrow's protest have been calling for you to say that they are not rioters and that they want the people who have been arrested to be released. Will you do this?

Chief Executive: Hong Kong is a very lawful society. I have just mentioned in response to another question that even as the Chief Executive (CE), I have to act lawfully. So I cannot override the law enforcement bodies to decide who should be arrested, who should be released – that is totally unlawful. And if I were to do this, I don't think many people or investors will continue to trust Hong Kong, because the CE could do anything – to arrest somebody or detain somebody or release somebody. So, no way, I'm not going to interfere into the investigations by the law enforcement bodies and also the prosecution and the judicial proceedings – everything has to be done lawfully. Especially for prosecution and judiciary decisions, they are independently discharged as provided for under the Basic Law. As the Chief Executive I cannot breach the law, let alone the Basic Law, which is such an important constitutional document. On your reference to the use of force, I think everybody who watched the TV news on that day will notice that the Police were doing defensive protection of the Legislative Council Building. What you have been told by the Commissioner of the Police is some – I wouldn't say all, definitely not all, because we are talking about 40 000 people maybe – some of protesters were quite violent. If you have looked at some of the weapons that the Police had seized, they were not the sort of equipment that one would deploy in a peaceful protest or a peaceful assembly on a social issue. Have you looked at the bricks? Large numbers of bricks, throwing at the Police. Have you looked at some of the cars deliberately being placed in the middle of the road to obstruct traffic? Did you know that one of my Principal Officials was sort of detained for several hours on a road because of the blockade? So I hope that you can take everything into consideration before you come to a conclusion of what the incident was on Wednesday.

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