

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting this morning (February 18):

Reporter: Firstly, on the Hong Kong people on the Diamond Princess cruise, what are the officials' difficulty in trying to contact the remaining ten of them? You mentioned they failed to contact ten, and do you know if anyone has already refused to go back home with the flights that you have arranged? And secondly, for the stranded people in Hubei Province, what has prevented from doing the same measure, like the Diamond Princess, and taking back home and arranging the same thing for them? Thirdly, in pressing ahead to use Chun Yeung Estate as a new quarantine centre, would you worry more protests to come and many accuse that you haven't consulted them earlier. How would you make up them? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Again three questions. First of all, the Immigration Department has deployed staff to try to reach every one of the 352 Hong Kong residents on board the Diamond Princess cruise. Up till now, my latest information is there are ten outstanding residents. We will continue to reach out to them as long as they have a contact but I understand that maybe one or two don't even have a contact. Another means to do it is through the cruise company because these people are on the cruise and the cruise company and the crew are still serving them, so we have asked the cruise company to help us to reach out to them. We are sending them letters. I'm going to send each of them a letter today to tell them exactly the arrangements that we have put in place.

At the moment, through the phone contacts we have received a certain number of residents' initial response, which is perhaps they don't want to take the charter flight, but I feel that we need to explain more fully what is the consequence of not taking the charter flight. For example, they may not realise that if they don't take this charter flight and they disembark, they think they could board a commercial flight and come back to Hong Kong, one is they may have difficulty in getting a commercial flight ticket because if people know they come from this cruise, then there may be some worries. Secondly is even if they manage to take a commercial flight back, upon arrival at the Hong Kong International Airport, they will be stopped by the Immigration Department because they will be put on this sort of watch list and our Port Health officials will then approach them and will likewise serve a quarantine order. They will end up in the same situation, but with travelling arrangements being done all by themselves. So I hope that, with that fuller explanation, those who have expressed some reservations about using our service, and by the way it is a free service that we are rolling out, will reconsider and let our Immigration Department know their exact decision because we need the decision pretty early so that we can arrange the

transport and so on.

The second question about Hubei, I have to stress that whether Hong Kong residents are facing distress in the Mainland or overseas, we accord the same importance and attention to them. But there are different circumstances and the whole Hubei Province is now still in a very critical stage of dealing with this epidemic, and all the public transport has been stopped and it would be very difficult to arrange local transport and so on. We are not giving up at all. We are still working very hard on trying to come up with a plan and to get the relevant authorities to support us in taking forward that plan but ultimately it is the safety, the health of our Hong Kong residents that are of paramount importance. Meanwhile, if they need any drugs, any support, this has been arranged through very special arrangements. I understand some Hong Kong residents in Hubei, whether it's Wuhan or another city, have already received their first batch of drugs from this special arrangement.

As far as the Chun Yeung Estate which will serve as an additional quarantine centre, this is absolutely essential because at the moment the four centres that we have in total provide only about 150 places. This Diamond Princess alone will bring back about 300 to the maximum, 300-something residents, who require compulsory quarantine in a centre which is guarded. They could not have quarantine at home because of the risk involved. So we need this additional facility and since the news went out about the use of this facility, we have already arranged the law enforcement bodies, basically the Police, to guard the estate because we, I mean Hong Kong, could not afford not to have this centre. We could not afford this centre to be vandalised and destroyed by rioters. We will do all we could to protect this estate and I hope residents in the vicinity – and by the way it is actually in the Fo Tan Industrial Estate, it's not right in the midst of the residential area – I hope residents around will accept this arrangement which is of benefit to the whole society.

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