

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 today (September 15):

Reporter: Mrs Lam, the 12 detainees in Shenzhen have not been able to contact their families for more than three weeks now and the chosen lawyers have not been allowed to visit them. How confident are you that their legal rights will be protected on the Mainland and what will the Government do to help them? And also the spokesman of the Foreign Ministry called the detainees "elements of separatism". What do you make of the statement and do you think that's appropriate when the 12 have not even faced trial? And will the detainees face national security charges on the Mainland? And thirdly about the mass testing programme, what do you make of the fact that, you know, three quarters of the population did not take part in the mass testing despite the Government's repeated calls for participation? Does this show that there's a widespread public mistrust in the Government and would you consider the programme successful or unsuccessful given that, only 32 people out of about 1.8 million people have been tested positive? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you very much for that question. If I may just briefly recap, the Hong Kong SAR Government adheres to key principles in dealing with cross-border or cross-boundary crimes. The first principle is every individual, every Hong Kong resident has to accept their own responsibility. If they go into another jurisdiction and breach the law, and in this case they were suspected to have illegally entered the Mainland, then they have to accept the legal liabilities. When you use a term legal rights, yes, every person should have their legal rights by law but they should also accept their legal liabilities. The second principle is actually a well-recognised legal principle around the world, that each jurisdiction shall handle any illegal acts in accordance with its laws. Since these suspected offenders are caught in the Mainland for breaching a Mainland law, then of course they will be subject to the Mainland jurisdiction and the law enforcement rules thereat. The third principle is no matter what, regardless of his or her background, the Hong Kong SAR Government will provide the needed and feasible assistance to every individual, every Hong Kong resident who is suspected of breaching the law outside Hong Kong. We are following this principle by contacting the relatives of the arrested and providing the needed assistance through our Immigration Department as well as our Guangdong Economic and Trade Office, and we will continue to do so. But as I said, we will do so in accordance with our law and also in full respect of the legal system in another jurisdiction.

About the comment, I do not wish to comment on an individual's comments because there are so many comments about Hong Kong these days, even when I was named by the Secretary of State in the United States. There's no

particular value in commenting on others' comments unless it is something of very important matter that we need to refute or respond to. As far as the crimes that have been suspected of making by the 12, I've made it very clear and I will repeat it briefly here. Of the 12 suspected persons who have now been detained in the Mainland, only one has allegedly committed an offence under the national security law. The other 11 have committed crimes under the Crimes Ordinance and they are very serious crimes of arson, possession of explosives, making of explosives and so on. The Government will have to take this very seriously in following up the case after these cases have been handled in the Mainland according to the Mainland laws.

About the Universal Community Testing Programme, first of all, this is a voluntary programme which was intended to give Hong Kong people a chance to go through a test. To have 1.78 million Hong Kong people voluntarily took part in a massive testing programme is a very good result. Originally we aimed at achieving, I would say, two objectives. One is to identify what we call the "silent transmitters", especially the asymptomatic cases because they did not have the symptoms, so they would not go forward to see a doctor and there's no way to tell that they have been infected. Our first objective is to identify these asymptomatic infected people and the programme has achieved that purpose. The second objective is to enable the Government and the community at large to have a better understanding of the infection situation in Hong Kong. When we first announced the scheme we were very worried that there could be a large number and this would affect our policy-making, for example in relaxation of social distancing measures. But now, with a relatively low rate, I think the rate is perhaps two cases per 100 000 situation. That provides a very good epidemiological picture of what is happening in Hong Kong.

Now I would add to those two original objectives other values that have come out of this Universal Community Testing Programme. One is it has raised the awareness of Hong Kong people in combating this epidemic, which is unlikely to go away for another period, until an effective vaccine is available and supplied to the community at large. It is very important for ordinary citizens to keep on reminding themselves that it is very important to wear the mask, very important to keep social distance, to avoid crowds and so on. Every of the 1.78 million Hong Kong residents, now I feel they will have a better awareness.

The second value that has come out of it is they have personally gone through this COVID-19 testing, because you remember when we started to launch this programme, there were a lot of smearing, bad-mouthing about the COVID-19 test, about the possible infections and this and that. So people could have fear and anxiety about subjecting themselves to a COVID-19 test. Now they have gone through it themselves together with their family members, and the great majority of reaction that I have heard is, "Well, it is very simple, it is very safe, it doesn't hurt me at all." So next time when there is going to be another outbreak, whether in an elderly home, whether in a public housing estate, that the public health authorities have to go into, sort of, more compulsory type of COVID-19 testing, at least the people affected will not have that same fear and anxiety. This is a very valuable experience for such

a large number of people.

And finally, Hong Kong is a very polarised society unfortunately because of events that have taken place in the last year or so. But in the last two weeks, we have seen people coming together. Six thousand medical, nursing and allied health and first-aid staff have come together to join hands at the testing centres. They may not know each other previously but they join hands to conduct this programme for one single purpose, that is to protect the health of the Hong Kong people. And this medical, nursing and first-aid network is extremely important for us to go through the next stage of this anti-epidemic work. I hope the whole exercise has also injected a certain degree of positive spirit, which is so lacking in Hong Kong society for a while. We will evaluate and conclude our experience in this programme and set the way forward. This afternoon I will host a press conference together with the relevant Principal Officials and we will love to give you more details on that occasion. Thank you very much.

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