

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting this morning (September 17):

Reporter: Mrs Lam, first of all, you talked about starting this dialogue platform with the first session starting next week. So what exactly are you expecting from the dialogue session next week, given the public distrust and public anger towards you and your administration? And my second question is that, you mentioned, you spoke about what happened on the weekend and we witnessed people with different political views engaging in brawls basically, but we don't really see a lot of government condemnation on those who attacked people, those who believe that they, who are believed to be pro-Beijing and pro-Government or pro-police, so what do you say about, does this constitute to people's distrust in the police, people's accusation in the police with regards to allegedly being selective in their prosecution, arrest and treatment of suspects? And my third question is – you've repeatedly rejected the demand for the setting up of a commission of inquiry, but aside from addressing alleged police brutality and their handling of the protests is also about the accountability of the Government, investigating the decision making within your administration by senior officials, so how are you addressing that part? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, the first question about the dialogue platform, we are holding the first session next week and this is an open dialogue platform which we will invite people from all walks of life to come to express their views to us. This is because of our conviction that communication is far better than confrontation. I hope there is no doubt by now that after three months of social unrest, after formal withdrawal of the bill which apparently has set off this social unrest, people now realise that it is not just about the bill. The problems go well beyond a bill, so it is important for the Government to listen and engage the community to have a better understanding of those problems. Of course, I understand some of these problems are about housing, about land shortage, about less diversity, less inclusiveness in our economy and so on, but since we are going into a new style of governance that is more open and more people-oriented, I think this sort of dialogue will be very helpful. That is the purpose of creating that dialogue and I can assure you that this is not a one-off gimmick type of function. It is intended to be organised on a very sustainable, and perhaps long-term basis. The volume of having this sort of dialogue sessions is also very important to us.

The second question is about the weekend protest and confrontations and maybe even fighting between groups of people with different political

backgrounds or different stances on individual subjects. I have to make it absolutely clear that the Government condemns all forms of violence. Our condemnation is not politically driven. In the same way, police's arrest and subsequent prosecution by the Department of Justice in an impartial manner are not politically driven. We act in accordance, in strict accordance, with the law based on the facts, so nobody should speculate or allege either my Government or the Police for being selective in the work that we are doing. This is something which is not acceptable in a place like Hong Kong, where we are so proud of the rule of law.

The third question is about the demands. We have already responded to the most pertinent demand from the people. If the social unrest was created by the bill, actually within days, I suspended the bill and stopped all the work. But having listened to the people and to create the necessary conditions for this dialogue, I formally withdraw the bill. Of course the technical legal procedure will have to wait for the commencement of the Legislative Council, but I made it very clear on September 4 as one of the four actions to start a dialogue that we will withdraw the bill, and similarly we have pledged full support to the Independent Police Complaints Council to undertake this very full fact-finding or I'll now call thematic study to understand the actual situation that has happened over the last three months. As far as the Government's point of view, I have acknowledged, almost three months ago, of what has gone wrong in promoting this bill or undertaking this legislative exercise. We have fully reflected on the inadequacies of the Government on various fronts and I'm happy to repeat them when an opportunity arises for us to explain what has happened.

Reporter: The people are asking ... the administration. It's not only about your, you being passionate and having, being responsible and leading Hong Kong out of the crisis. People are asking why are you still, why is nobody in the Government, within the Government being punished for what has happened? Hong Kong is suffering. Businesses are suffering. Moody's and Fitch have downgraded their outlook on Hong Kong.

Chief Executive: I uphold this principle of accountability, but at the moment it is all for us to see that Hong Kong is undergoing a very difficult situation, and sanctions or punishment are not going to help lift Hong Kong out of this very difficult situation. We need to work as a team not only within the Government but also with community and society at large to overcome the current difficulties. And that's why we all take up the challenge to continue to serve the people of Hong Kong and work even harder in engaging and listening to the people in order to achieve that particular objective.

Reporter: Two questions, actually. First question is Moody's, the credit rating agency, has downgraded its outlook for Hong Kong from "stable" to "negative". What's your comment? And the second question is, according to a number of reports, the Hong Kong Government has sought to hire PR firms to revamp its public image. Is this true? And is it true that the PR firms have rejected these bids and if so, what's the Hong Kong Government's plan with regard to restoring its image? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, the Financial Secretary has already issued a very detailed statement about Moody's decision yesterday. To change the outlook of Hong Kong's rating from "stable" to "negative" is something that we find disappointing, and we do not concur, especially if the justification for that sort of change in outlook was premised on whether we are still upholding "One Country, Two Systems", whether Hong Kong's institutions are as strong and robust as previously, whether more integration with the Mainland economy will blur the "Two Systems". Premising on those bases, we do not agree with the "negative" rating. But, as I have commented on a previous rating decision, the continued instability and social unrest in Hong Kong, as we have seen some of these violent acts from time to time, will inevitably undermine and adversely affect international perception about Hong Kong's business environment. This is something that we have to be very alert to and that's why I said while creating this dialogue platform, the first priority is still to stop this violence and to restore law and order in Hong Kong as soon as possible.

About your second point, the Government from time to time will have to find some outside help in the form of consultancies to advise us or to actually help us to execute some of our local as well as overseas promotion work, and I could confirm that at one point in time, we did have that idea of approaching some international PR firms to provide some advice. This is something that has happened. The advice we have been given is the time is not right because we are still in this sort of social unrest, disturbance and violent acts and vandalism on such a regular basis. It would perhaps be not the most cost-effective way to use the government resources to launch any campaign to rebuild Hong Kong's reputation. But sooner or later we will have to do it because I have every confidence in Hong Kong's fundamentals. Similarly, in responding to Moody's decision, our statement stressed that Hong Kong's fundamentals remain very strong, whether it is "One Country, Two Systems", the rule of law, our connectivity, our many opportunities arising from national initiatives and so on. The time will come for us to launch a major campaign to restore Hong Kong's reputation given some of the damage done to it as a result of what has happened in the last few months.

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