

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 (November 19):

Chief Executive: I just say a few words in English. In the course of the police operation regarding the Polytechnic University, I have reached an understanding with the Commissioner of Police in dealing with this very difficult operation, which is justified on the basis of putting an end to the violence that we have seen over these months. In fact, the Polytechnic University campus has been seized for quite some time already and we are extremely worried about the dangerous situation in the campus. The two important principles that I have laid out for the police operation – the first is of course to have a peaceful resolution as far as possible. This objective could only be achieved with the full co-operation of the protesters, including the rioters, that they have to stop violence, give up their weapons and come out peacefully and take the instructions from the Police.

The second principle is a very exceptional one. Although the Police have said that after the warning, anyone leaving the campus will have to be arrested. In light of the special circumstances and the age, that is under 18, of a certain number of participants within the campus, and in order to achieve the objective of both a peaceful and sort of a reconciliatory resolution, I have asked that the treatments to these minors should be in a very humanitarian way. We have arranged for principals and religious groups' representatives to go into the campus to encourage and persuade these minors to come out peacefully. And if they come out peacefully, we will just put down their data. We make a record of their personal data and they may then leave the campus and return to home. We have not done any immediate arrests of these underage protesters or other participants within the campus, but of course we will have to reserve the right to undertake further investigations in future.

At the moment, as far as I could gather, there were about 600 people within the Polytechnic campus who have come out. About 200 of them are minors, and they have been subject to the special arrangements that I have just referred to. Of the other 400 over 18, they will be or they have been immediately arrested, whether they came out peacefully on their own, surrendered themselves to the Police, or they came out using various methods and were caught by the Police during this operation. The latest assessment given to me is that perhaps there would be about a hundred or so people still on campus, so I made a very strong plea that for every one of us who are concerned about the situation, we will use whatever means to continue to persuade and arrange for these remaining protesters to leave the campus as

soon as possible so that this whole operation could be able to end in a peaceful manner, and lay the basis for the subsequent work by the Police to stop violence in Hong Kong. Thank you very much.

Reporter: At the weekend, the PLA were seen on the streets of Hong Kong for the first time since the protest began, cleaning up debris. In a statement to CNN, your government said that they were there purely for community, volunteer activity, and this was something that they did out of their own initiative. Does it concern you that the PLA did this unilaterally? Do you anticipate that we will see the PLA again on the streets of Hong Kong? And at what level, new level of violence needs to be reached for you to call upon the PLA to become involved in what's happening here in Hong Kong, including the ongoing standoff in Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which as you say has turned into a war zone?

Chief Executive: First of all, as you have referred to in our response to enquiry about the garrison's voluntary participation in clearing the roadblocks and the debris on the streets, we have made it very clear, and I repeat here, the garrison's stationing in Hong Kong is of course to perform defense functions, but it is not uncommon from time to time for the garrison to undertake some voluntary and charitable activities in Hong Kong. There are very clear rules and circumstances governing those situations. I can give you a list of examples of the garrison's participation in such charitable and voluntary activities. Like last year when we have a Super Typhoon Mangkhut, they came out to help clear the collapsed trees which of course was much welcomed by the people of Hong Kong, and from time to time, they also visited some elderly homes and they arranged training activities for some of our youngsters and so on. I would suggest that we do not over-interpret this particular act of voluntary involvement, particularly if you look at the actual circumstances – the ordinary Hong Kong citizens, they were taking part in clearing roads right in front of one of the military facilities of the garrison, that is Kowloon East. For any ordinary people, if people are helping to clear the road in front of your building, then you feel more obliged to give a helping hand, so that's the situation.

As we have also clarified, this voluntary act of the garrison did not come under any provisions in the Basic Law – that is it is not in response to my request. That is the second point. You asked about when we would resort to formally inviting the garrison to help. I would assure you that we remain very confident that we are able to cope with the situation, and that's why operations like that happening in the Polytechnic University is a very important one. I for one appreciate that it is a very difficult one. It is a very complicated operation, but if we were not able to undertake any operations to arrest these rioters, who are resorting to escalating violence, and who are damaging Hong Kong from one place to another, from one campus to another, and manufacturing more and more life-threatening weapons and petrol bombs and so on, we will not be able to demonstrate and display that competence in dealing with the situation. Right now, we are still sort of displaying and demonstrating that competence to handle the situation ourselves.

Reporter: Mrs Lam, the Police have been besieging the Polytechnic University since Sunday, and many people, as you said, are still trapped inside. Will you as the Chief Executive make sure that the people trapped inside can return home safely and will not receive any unfair treatment even if they are to be arrested?

Chief Executive: Thank you for that question. As I have said, I have agreed with the Commissioner of Police. In handling this very difficult and complicated but necessary operation, there are two important principles. The first will be able to address your question. The first is we all want to achieve it in a very peaceful manner, but we are very much, our police colleagues are very much, on the reactive side. If the protesters are coming out in a peaceful manner, in other words they stop violence, they give up their weapons, they take the advice of the policemen, then there is no situation that that sort of violence will happen, and the Police will of course render fair treatment to everybody, both arrested or those recorded and allowed to go home without being arrested. By this, I mean those under the age of 18, and we have about 200 of these under 18 who have come out of the campus and have been dealt with in a humanitarian manner. That is something that we will continue to adopt as a very important guideline. The reason I cannot give you an absolute guarantee is because the situation is changing. For argument's sake, if we were suddenly seeing some very major, life-threatening incidents on the campus, then – as I said, the Police are on the reactive side – the Police have to take the necessary action to prevent any tragedies from happening in Hong Kong.

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