

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 today (May 26):

Reporter: On the national security law, of course Hong Kong people know that when law enforcement officers operate in Hong Kong, they have to abide by some kind of law, but after your explanation Hong Kong people still have two major concerns. The first one is the possibility of this Mainland security agency being set up in Hong Kong. Will it allow officers to arrest Hong Kong people who took part in anti-government marches in the past or that kind of activity? And the second one is that while you said Hong Kong people's freedom can be continued to be protected, some legal scholars have said that even calling for the Chief Executive to step down would constitute subversion against state power. So under these two major concerns, how can this be continuing to protect Hong Kong people's freedom of speech under international covenants? And how can this be targeting small minority of Hong Kongers? While I know that you don't have much detail to tell us, how can you reassure Hong Kong people and foreign investors that we still enjoy our legal rights and freedoms and this is not another form of the extradition bill? Thank you.

Chief Executive: To answer your question, the most important assurance is contained in the articles in the draft Decision and also the very clear exposition given by not only the National People's Congress leader, but I also understand that several leaders have spoken on this subject during the session of the National People's Congress. That is not just hearsay, that is a very clear statement and assurances given by the leaders of the People's Republic of China. For people who still have concerns, they will have to wait for the details to be put in front of them before they could be assured.

Some of the things that you have said about Mainland agencies coming down to arrest people undergoing protest and they will be arrested for calling for the Chief Executive to step down are at the moment your imaginations or things that have been said by some people. We are a very free society, so for the time being people have this freedom to say whatever they want to say. But ultimately what is to be provided in this piece of legislation is for all of us to see in order to be assured that Hong Kong's freedoms will be preserved and Hong Kong's vibrancy and the core values in terms of the rule of law, the independence of the Judiciary, the various rights and freedoms enjoyed by people will continue to be there.

When you quoted the ICCPR, all these international covenants do also confess and admit the need for national security. Rights and freedoms are not

absolute. If we want to protect the majority of the people, then if a minority of people, indeed a very small minority of people, are going to breach the law, to organise and participate in terrorist activities, to subvert the state power, of course they have to be bound by the needed legislation.

Reporter: You say that the people of Hong Kong will still enjoy the rights and freedoms that they've always enjoyed under this new national security law. Well that includes the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression. Can the people of Hong Kong still protest on the streets, voicing opposition to you, the Hong Kong Government and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party)? Can you guarantee this, and will the national security law be retrospective? Thank you.

Chief Executive: My answer is, also the answer that I've given in response to other questions is that the assurances are very clearly laid out in the draft Decision as well as the explanation given by the National People's Congress leader. There is no need for us to worry because in the last 23 years whenever people worried about Hong Kong's freedoms of speech and freedoms of expressions and protest, time and again Hong Kong has proven that we uphold and preserve those values. I think the best thing is to see the legislation in front of us, and to understand why at this point in time Hong Kong needs this piece of legislation, for the bigger benefit of the great majority of Hong Kong people.

Reporter: But can people still protest...

Chief Executive: Hong Kong has over 10 000 public order events every year. That has been a figure that I quoted whenever I go out to meet with international business community. That is the proof of Hong Kong's vibrancy and respect for rights and freedoms. Protest itself is an expression of freedoms and rights and opinions if it is done in a legal way. You must observe the law, everybody has a right to observe the law. It is just not quite reasonable for you to ask me to guarantee that a certain type of protest will be allowed and other type will not be allowed. It has to depend on the circumstances and whether it has been done in a legal fashion.

Reporter: And will the law be retrospective?

Chief Executive: I could not comment when the law is yet to be drafted.

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