

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (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 (November 23):

Reporter: Good morning, Mrs Lam, we have two questions. First, urging blank votes is illegal but most countries allow them as a voter's right. Can you clarify, is it legal for Hongkongers to cast protest votes? Or could even answering this question be legally problematic? Second question, the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens has been postponed yet again, citing uncertainty over ongoing travel restrictions and inbound quarantine arrangement and the Oxfam Trailwalker was also axed. Are you worried that the city's COVID-19 rules will prevent it from keeping its status as a hub for international sporting events, a goal that you set out in your 2021 Policy Address? Thank you.

Chief Executive: First of all, regarding what is legal and what is illegal, one has to look at the law. What does the law say about the legality of a certain act or activity? Secondly, one has to look at the evidence in order to justify that a certain act or activity is breaching the law. And third, it has to be a decision to prosecute made by the independent prosecutors, and finally adjudicated by the independent courts in Hong Kong. I do not have the amended version of the electoral legislation in front of me, but if I remember correctly, in our work to enact local legislation to put into effect the National People's Congress (NPC)' Decision and the amendments to Annex I and Annex II of the Basic Law, we have introduced two offences, because the NPC Decision does require the Hong Kong SAR to make sure that we have means to suppress or prevent interference with a fair election. I think where it refers to casting blank votes or prohibiting or persuading people not to vote, there is a certain lead-in, that is, it probably takes the form of public activities, trying to incite voters to do this sort of activities. It could hardly just be you asking me a question and I will say that you have offended the law, let's be very clear and certain about it, because Hong Kong is very proud of our rule of law and our legislation is, very often, very clearly drafted in order to ensure that we will implement the law in a fair and just manner.

The second question about the impact of COVID-19 on sports events, inevitably, it will have a significant impact. I'm not saying that we are doing everything as normal under this COVID-19 situation. But if you look at Hong Kong as compared to other cities over the last six months or so, we have been able to conduct quite a good number of these activities under a very robust system of quarantine control. Every time when we took a decision on whether a particular event could be organised under the current COVID-19 situation, one has to look at the nature of that event. A cycling event will be very different from a rugby event in terms of the social contacts and interactions and the risk of infections. And a sports event in a velodrome,

for example, or in the racecourse, will be very different from a running event all around Hong Kong, where it is very difficult to make sure that the anti-epidemic rules and infection control rules are being strictly complied with. I'm afraid that we will have to wait more patiently and encourage more vaccinations in Hong Kong so that those international sports events which Hong Kong people love to take part could resume as soon as possible.

Thank you.

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