

Transcript of remarks by SLW on quarantine arrangement for foreign domestic helpers

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on quarantine arrangement for foreign domestic helpers after attending a radio programme this morning (June 27):

Reporter: Why is the Government against the idea of subsidising the employers of foreign domestic helpers and also offering them quarantine facilities in Hong Kong?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: I can say that we really want to help, but any way which would encourage directly or indirectly the movement of domestic helpers from Hong Kong to their homeland or from their homeland back to Hong Kong is not consistent with our policy to restrict such movement to reduce the risk of spread of the virus.

Our current policy is to try to minimise such movement, including allowing extension of contracts; extending the stay of those who have ended their contract so that they can find a new employer here in Hong Kong; and also for those who are between contracts – they can stay in Hong Kong without the need of requiring them to go back to their homeland. These are the policy strategies that try to restrict the movement of domestic helpers from Hong Kong to and from their homeland. Any other measures, although we would like to help, if that would encourage such movement, that would be inconsistent with our anti-epidemic measures.

I have to plead to employers and employment agencies that the existing policy is to facilitate domestic helpers here now in Hong Kong to continue to stay either by way of extending their contract or finding a new employer. That is our basic objective.

Reporter: How many domestic helpers will arrive in Hong Kong in the next month?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: We do not have very accurate information in recent months, because we do not actually differentiate their status – whether they are domestic helpers or not. If they are having a valid visa or a working permit, then they would be treated as Hong Kong residents. So we do not have up-to-date figures.

As you know, we have around 400 000 foreign domestic helpers here in Hong Kong. Every contract is about two years. On average we would have around 500 foreign domestic helpers coming in Hong Kong every day in a normal period. Because of the measures we have taken so far, the number of people who have actually come back from the Philippines to Hong Kong in the past one month is only around 1 700, which is a very small number. But if we provide

such facilitation that directly or indirectly encourages them to come, that number will jump up very quickly. Every day we will have about two to three flights from Manila. We would expect 500 of them every day. Within 14 days, we would have 7 000. That is a very large number. We would not have sufficient quarantine facilities to house this group of people just from the Philippines. This is the concern. The primary consideration is our anti-epidemic strategies to help or protect our citizens in Hong Kong.

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