

Speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration on the Fourth Report of the Constitutional Development Task Force in Legco

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Following is the speech (translation) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Donald Tsang, on the Fourth Report of the Constitutional Development Task Force in the Legislative Council meeting today (December 15).

Madam President,

The Fourth Report of the Constitutional Development Task Force will be published today, ushering in a new phase of the discussion of our constitutional development.

The Task Force published the Third Report on 11 May 2004, setting out the areas which might be considered for amendment in respect of the methods for selecting the Chief Executive in 2007 and forming the Legislative Council in 2008 ("the two Methods"). This was immediately followed by a consultation exercise spanning over five months to solicit public views until 15 October this year.

During the consultation period, the Task Force has received more than 480 submissions from organisations and individuals through various open channels, such as emails, posts and facsimiles. The Task Force has also organised a number of seminars and focus group discussions. The participants came from different backgrounds and sectors, including, among others, Members of the Executive Council, Members of the Legislative Council, members of the District Councils, members of the Election Committee, as well as representatives from professional bodies, chambers of commerce, academic institutions, women groups, youth organisations, labour organisations and kai-fong associations. A total of about 870 people participated in the seminars and focus group discussions. They represent nearly all sectors and all classes with different political views and background in the local community. Except some submissions which wish to remain anonymous, all views collected have been incorporated in Appendices 1 and 2 of the Fourth Report for public inspection.

For easy reference by the public, Chapter Three and Chapter Four of the Fourth Report set out respectively the views and the relevant

justifications often put forward by people. The Task Force has also summarised the views collected and on this basis raised some issues which need to be followed up. We hope that these follow-up questions may help focus discussions in the community on specific ways to amend the two Methods.

Madam President, public opinions are still divided on how to amend the two Methods. However, there emerged one relatively clear basic direction from the consultation and that is, the general public expect that we will eventually move towards the goal of universal suffrage, have more say, and more channels to participate, in the election of the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council, and that the representativeness of the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council could be further enhanced. We will proceed to deal with this issue along this line.

Madam President, during the consultation period there are many views that the selection of the Chief Executive to be held in the year 2007 should be by means of universal suffrage and the selection of the Legislative Council in the year 2008 should also be by means of an election of all the members by universal suffrage. The Task Force understands their aspirations but these proposals are inconsistent with the Decision made by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on 26 April. That decision was a most authoritative and solemn decision made by the Central Authorities after careful considerations. It is impractical to press for universal suffrage in the years 2007 and 2008. This will only bring more misunderstanding and endless disputes. Therefore, the Task Force will not take any further actions with regard to these proposals.

The Task Force has also received quite a number of views on issues other than those concerning the two Methods. The Task Force appreciates that some organizations and individuals who made the submissions wish that a timetable should be set and organization made in preparation for elections by universal suffrage. Such issues are very important but also very complex. We think that they should better be dealt with at a later stage. The immediate task now is to decide on the changes to be made in respect of the two Methods in 07/08.

It should also be noted that some of the views collected have touched on issues of more fundamental principle, including the roles and future of

functional constituencies as well as possible modes and methods of holding universal suffrage. The Task Force considers that these issues deserve wider discussions in the community.

The Task Force sincerely hopes that the public would study the Fourth Report carefully and continue to seek common ground with an open mind and be more tolerant. We hope that people would listen to others' views and review their own position, and make sober reflections on ways to narrow differences of opinion.

The Task Force hopes that round about mid-2005, a consensus will emerge within the community. By then, the Task Force will issue a fifth report setting out a mainstream proposal. The Task Force calls on members of the public to seize the opportunity and put forward, by 31 March 2005, a package which is most acceptable to all parties concerned and, at the same time, in accordance with the Basic Law and the NPCSC Decision.

The Task Force will continue to gauge views and proposals from the community through extensive, open and public channels. We welcome submissions from the public through various established channels. On top of this, we will also strive to take the public pulse by collecting views in the coming months through other means such as public forums, group discussions and meetings with various District Councils.

Madam President, in addition to views from the general public, we would certainly like to listen to the views of Members of this Council. Indeed, it is stipulated in Annexes I and II of the Basic Law that any amendments to the two Methods must be made with the endorsement of a two-thirds majority of all the Members of the Legislative Council. I hope that Members of this Council, irrespective of your political affiliation, will exercise your constitutional obligations conferred by the Basic Law and endeavour to reach a consensus to take forward constitutional development in Hong Kong towards the ultimate goal of universal suffrage.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ends/Wednesday, December 15, 2004