

**Opening Statement by
Mr. Raymond R. Wong, Chairman,
Committee on Review of Public Service Broadcasting
at the LegCo ITB Panel Special Meeting on January 25, 2006**

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members:

Since the announcement on Tuesday a week ago, the forthcoming review of public service broadcasting (PSB) has attracted extensive media and public interest. Although today's meeting has come earlier than the Committee has expected—as its first meeting won't even be held until tomorrow—I welcome this opportunity to reiterate the mission and approach of the Committee and to listen to the views of Honorable Members.

Free speech and free press are two of Hong Kong people's fundamental rights and are so enshrined in our Basic Law. As there is a wide range of affordable audiovisual contents available on a multitude of platforms, it is therefore legitimate and logical for the community to consider:

- Why do we need PSB in Hong Kong? What role should it play?
- How should PSB be funded, and in this connection, who should pay how much for it?
- How should PSB be monitored and its performance be evaluated, what are the benchmarks for assessment, to whom should be entrusted with this monitoring role, and how to involve the public in the process of monitoring? And, lastly
- How should a PSB system be implemented which would serve Hong Kong best?

These are precisely what the Committee has been tasked to examine. And I believe the review's outcome will have a far-reaching impact on the future development of broadcasting—including PSB—in Hong Kong.

The Committee has an important and exciting mission to fulfill. Speaking on behalf of the Committee, I can assure you that it will conduct the review professionally and impartially. The Committee will examine all relevant issues with intellectual rigor. It will consult extensively, and listen with sensitivity and an open mind.

And most importantly, the Committee pledges to you and to the people of Hong Kong that we shall carry out the review in an open and transparent manner. We shall remain independent of and resist any and all undue pressure and influence, whether they be from any political or commercial interests, or from its members' own personal prejudices as well as those of others, both real and perceived. Only then can the Committee preserve the integrity of the review and the credibility of the Committee's findings.

Turning to the substance of the review, please allow me to re-emphasize that it would be a "macro" review. That is not to say the Committee will dwell on theories and come up with ill-defined recommendations divorced from reality. We all know PSB is available in Hong Kong, and is paid for with public funds. The Committee also is well aware that there are hundreds of people who make a living from and a career of providing PSB. The Committee will take great care to ensure that its final recommendations would not cause any undue hardship for them.

The review is a "macro" one because there are many related issues and very diverse interests involved. We will strive to understand what kind of PSB does the community need and want, consult stakeholders with diverse and often conflicting interests, conduct research on overseas experiences, seek the counsel of experts abroad and analyze their relevance to Hong Kong.

At the conclusion of this review, the Committee will recommend a way forward that will reflect community expectations, will be practicable with finite resources, and sustainable despite the changing demographics of this Special Administrative Region and ever-advancing delivery technology.

A macro review of this nature cannot be conducted behind close doors. It is imperative that the Committee reaches out to the public—to deepen their understanding of the role and functions of PSB, to understand their needs and expectations, and to encourage all to express their preferences. We must also consult the industry players and individual practitioners in the broadcasting industry. Should the need arise, the Committee may solicit opinion on specific issues from overseas experts.

Public and industry engagement is a critical task for the Committee. It looks forward to receiving inputs from all sectors of the community, from Radio Television Hong Kong and commercial broadcasters, from staff unions and other affected parties, and from Honorable Members of the Legislative Council and District Councils.

As to the deluge of speculations and rumors relating to RTHK that has inundated some of the print media the past week, I want to assure Honorable

Members and the community-at-large that I would not have accepted appointment had there been any hint of using the review as a pretext for “whipping RTHK into line”. I have no doubt that the same goes for my fellow Committee members. All the irresponsible chatter and unjustified attacks, whether against the Committee in general or me in particular, will not deter the Committee from soldiering on by holding itself to the pledge of adopting an open and engaging approach in conducting this independent review.

As I’ve mentioned on the outset this afternoon, the Committee will meet for the first time tomorrow, so I really don’t have much more to say for now.

However, those of the Committee who are here this afternoon—there are a couple who have gone out of town—are anxious to hear your wise counsel. The Committee also looks forward to receiving your and other Honorable Members’ continued support in this challenging review process.

Once again, thank you for having invited us to your distinguished panel’s meeting.

ENDS