

Press Releases

CE's remarks on Green Paper on Constitutional Development (with video)

Following is the English version of the remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang, to the press on the publication of the Green Paper on Constitutional Development today (July 11):

Today, we have published the Green Paper on Constitutional Development. This represents a significant milestone in Hong Kong's constitutional development. As I had undertaken during my election campaign, we will launch a public consultation exercise on the implementation of universal suffrage after the inauguration of the Third Term HKSAR Government. The Green Paper published today presents three types of options on the models, roadmap and timetable for implementing universal suffrage for the Chief Executive (CE) and the Legislative Council (Legco) respectively. Members of the public can discuss and indicate their preferences on the different options.

The Hong Kong community has been engaging in discussion on, and debated at different stages, the issue of constitutional development. It is now time to identify for Hong Kong a set of solutions to allow constitutional development to progress in a clear direction towards further political maturity in a steady manner.

In the past 20 months, the Commission on Strategic Development has examined the issue of constitutional development in depth. This has provided a solid foundation for the public consultation on the Green Paper. However, I do not underestimate the difficulty in reaching consensus. This is because, while our ultimate goal of attaining universal suffrage is clear, we will still need further discussion on how and when universal suffrage should be implemented, with a view to reaching consensus as far as possible.

Consensus can only be reached with the participation of the political parties and councillors in Legco and organisations from different quarters, as well as wide support among members of the public. I hope that, after discussion within the community, a mainstream option will emerge which can secure two-thirds majority support in Legco, and, with the consent of the CE, can stand a good chance of being accepted by the Central Authorities in accordance with the Basic Law.

Hong Kong is a place of constant progress. Every industry seeks innovation and improvement. As regards our electoral system, Hong Kong also needs to strive for creativity, advancement and competitiveness. Our common goal is that, when universal suffrage is attained, aspirants, who are committed to serving the community and are capable of enhancing good governance in Hong Kong, will be elected as the CE and Legco Members.

While the community has been discussing the issue of universal suffrage for years, this public consultation exercise is the first time that wide-ranging discussion on the models, roadmap and timetable for implementing universal suffrage is

initiated within HKSAR. I hope that every sector of the community, including political parties, think tanks, academics and members of the public, will seize this opportunity to express their views in a rational, accommodating and open manner. It will be a remarkable achievement of Hong Kong if a mainstream option which is practicable, in compliance with the Basic Law, and consistent with public aspirations, can eventually become a reality.

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Press Releases

Transcript of remarks by CS and SCMA at press conference on
on "Green Paper on Constitutional Development" (with video)

Following are the remarks (English portion) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Henry Tang and the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Stephen Lam, to the media on the "Green Paper on Constitutional Development" at the Conference Hall, Central Government Offices, New Annexe, this afternoon (July 11):

Reporter: What can you say to convince people that in constructing this multiple choice exam you have given us, this consultation paper, that you are not seeking to confuse people, string out the whole thing and buy time. And Mr Lam, Paragraph 5.16, how is it that doing Legco in one go would not be inconsistent with gradual approach towards universal suffrage.

Chief Secretary for Administration: First, your question regarding the choices. We should never underestimate the community's intelligence because this issue has been in the public arena for many years, and indeed, I believe that Hong Kong people are intelligent enough to have fairly extensive knowledge about what kind of universal suffrage they would wish to achieve and what timeframe they are thinking about. That's why we have to distil the key elements of achieving universal suffrage in accordance with the Basic Law into this consultation document and crystallise these elements, so that the public can give their views very specifically on those key elements.

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: This is the only way we can do justice to the 300-plus submissions that we have received. If, out of 323 submissions and recommendations that we have received, we only set out three sets of proposals in this green paper, we wouldn't be doing justice to the rest of the world. We have methodically laid out for everybody to understand what are the key issues to be addressed and as the Chief Secretary has outlined, there are about five key elements on which we need to make a choice. So it's not that complicated. As regards Paragraph 5.16, I suppose your question is whether going for universal suffrage of Legislative Council in one go is consistent with the Basic Law. Let me explain that at this stage, since we are doing a green paper public consultation exercise we are more liberal with the ideas that we take on board. We only discard those ideas which are definitely not consistent with the Basic Law. For example, if there is a proposal which suggests we should not establish a nominating committee, that's not consistent with the Basic Law, so we put it to one side. For example, last year we discussed the possibility of adopting a bicameral system for the Legislative Council that would require some amendments to the Basic Law, so we put that to one side. At this stage, most of the other ideas do not fall into that category which is definitely inconsistent with the Basic Law. So let's discuss, let's see how far we can go. But of course, at a later stage we need to propose amendments to Annexes I and II of the Basic Law. We also need, at a further later stage, to deal with local legislation. At those two stages we must adopt proposals which are consistent with the Basic Law.

Reporter: My question is for the Chief Secretary. During the first 10 years here we have seen amazing economic convergence with China, with Pearl River Delta. To what extent going forward do you think political convergence is an important question. Do you expect the pace of democratic reform in Hong Kong is tethered, or do you see it as tethered to the pace of political reform in China?

Chief Secretary for Administration: Under the "One Country, Two Systems" the economic development and the political development in Hong Kong are clearly laid out under the Basic Law. So I think the short answer to your question is we - both us and the Central People's Government - will follow the Basic Law to the letter. Both governments are sincere to adhere to both the word as well as the spirit of the Basic law to ensure the continuous success of "One Country, Two Systems".

Reporter: I want to follow up my earlier question and the comments you have made since. Mr Tang and Mr Lam, you have both said you removed those things which are obviously inconsistent with the Basic Law. You have sought to be liberal in including things, which means some things might or might not be consistent with the Basic Law and you are going to have to bring amendments to Annexes I and II. Before you bring the annexes I think you would want to assure yourselves that you are not bringing something that's inconsistent. Can you rule out now or will you be seeking an interpretation on whatever you bring forward before you seek those amendments?

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: I think the clear and direct answer to your question is that at this stage the most important thing is for the Hong Kong community to come to a consensual view on how to implement universal suffrage. It will then be up to this government to ensure that any proposed amendments to Annexes I and II of the Basic Law will be legally sound, and of course, at the appropriate stage we will seek legal advice. I also think that the provisions of Annexes I and II of Articles 45 and 68 are now all there for us to see, to seek to implement, and at this stage it is unproductive to speculate as to whether we need to seek an interpretation of the Basic Law. This government has made it clear on previous occasions that interpretation to the Basic Law are not lightly to be sought and at this stage I see no need to do so.

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

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