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Response to remarks by Dr Hon Kwok Ka-ki: Government has not taken any view on issue of universal suffrage

Commenting on the remarks made by the Dr Hon Kwok Ka-ki in his "Letter to Hong Kong" broadcast on RTHK today (July 22), a Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau spokesman said that the HKSAR Government had not taken any view on the issue of universal suffrage, and would endeavour to take forward discussions within the community in the hope that a mainstream view could be formed.

He said, "The fact that the HKSAR Government has issued the Green Paper on Constitutional Development (the Green Paper) 11 days after inauguration on July 1 underlines the commitment of the Government to resolve the issue of universal suffrage within the five year term.

"We have been very open in setting out in the Green Paper all key issues, so that the public can discuss and make choices on the different options and timetable for implementing universal suffrage.

"For example, for forming the Legislative Council (LegCo) by universal suffrage, aside from the option of allowing functional constituencies (FCs) to nominate candidates for registered voters to vote members into office, as proposed by some, the Green Paper has also included the option of replacing FC seats with district-based seats returned through direct elections.

"As for universal suffrage timetable, options provided in the Green Paper include: 2012, 2017 or beyond 2017 for the Chief Executive (CE); and 2012, 2016 or beyond 2016 for LegCo," he said.

Regarding the requirement of "nomination by the nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures", the spokesman said that the Green Paper had already set out all the relevant views received, and that we should deal with the issue in accordance with the Basic Law.

He said that it was entirely proper to invite public views on the number of candidates to be put forth to stand for universal suffrage election as the CE.

"It is important that the people of Hong Kong know how many candidates will be standing in the general election, so that they will have an idea of the scope and scale of the election in which they will play a part. After we have reached consensus on this issue, detailed procedures can be discussed further and agreed upon.

"Dr Kwok's allegation that this question is misleading is totally groundless. Dr Kwok should base his claims on facts," he said.

The spokesman added that the Government expected that

universities and independent think-tanks would conduct opinion polls to gauge public support for various electoral models. These polls would provide useful references for the Government.

"By constitutional design of the Basic Law, any changes to our electoral systems require two-thirds majority support in LegCo, consent by the CE and endorsement by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. We hope that, following the public consultation exercise, differences in opinions will have narrowed adequately for a mainstream view to be formed.

"If so, we can put forth a package of proposals, which, hopefully, stands a good chance of securing tripartite constitutional consensus and majority support among Hong Kong people."

The spokesman said that the people of Hong Kong rightfully expected the Government and LegCo to demonstrate leadership in the discussion, and to help forge consensus within the community.

"We hope that LegCo Members, including those of the opposition, will engage in constructive discussion of the issue of universal suffrage and strive to come to a consensual view on the way forward, so that Hong Kong's democracy can progress."

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