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Government committed to implementing universal suffrage

Commenting on the remarks made by Legislative Councillor Ronny Tong on RTHK's "Hong Kong Letter" broadcast today (August 18), a spokesman for the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau said the third-term HKSAR Government, led by the Chief Executive Mr Donald Tsang, had taken a position more advanced than that adopted in any previous term of Government in pushing forward democracy in Hong Kong.

The spokesman said that the publication of the Green Paper on Constitutional Development had delivered one of the key electoral promises of the Chief Executive. "The fact that the Government has issued this public consultation document 11 days after inauguration underlines the Government's commitment to deal with the issue of universal suffrage within the five-year term," he said.

The spokesman said the Green Paper had set out different views put forth by the Commission on Strategic Development and the community on the key issues for implementing universal suffrage. In order to facilitate public discussion, the relevant views were summarised and presented as three types of options in the Green Paper.

Options for the universal suffrage timetable include: 2012, 2017 or beyond 2017 for the Chief Executive; and 2012, 2016 or beyond 2016 for the Legislative Council.

Options for the composition and size of the nominating committee for the Chief Executive election include: forming the nominating committee by less than 800 members; forming the nominating committee by 800 members; and forming the nominating committee by more than 800 members, for example, 1,200 or 1,600 members.

Options for the number of candidates to be put forth for Chief Executive election by the public include: 10 candidates or more; eight candidates at most; and two to four candidates at most.

Another key issue is how the Legislative Council's Functional Constituency (FC) elections can be replaced. Options for this issue include: replacing the FC seats with district-based seats returned through direct election; retaining the FC seats, but changing the electoral method; and increasing the number of seats representing District Councils in the Legislative Council.

The spokesman said, "The Government has not taken a view on the key issues. However, once consensus is attained on them, universal suffrage is achievable."

The spokesman emphasised that Hong Kong would have universal suffrage because of the Basic Law, not the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This is because in 1990 when the Basic Law was enacted, the Central

Authorities responded to the views of the Hong Kong community and stipulated universal suffrage as the ultimate aim to be attained.

Article 45 of the Basic Law provides that we should establish "a broadly representative nominating committee" to nominate Chief Executive candidates for universal suffrage election.

The Chief Executive candidates must first obtain the support of different professions, sectors and strata represented in the nominating committee; following nomination, they must obtain the support of registered voters during the election; and then the elected candidate must receive the appointment by the Central People's Government. "This is to ensure that the elected Chief Executive will have sufficient public support in governing Hong Kong according to the Basic Law," the spokesman said.


"At this stage, the community should first strive to agree on the number of candidates which the nominating committee should put forth. The public will then have a clearer idea of the scale of the general election. Thereafter, detailed nomination procedures can be discussed and agreed upon," he said.

The spokesman said the Government hoped that any proposal for implementing universal suffrage could attract majority public support. In the coming months, universities and think-tanks will conduct independent opinion polls, and the Government will track the level of public support for various proposals closely.

The spokesman pointed out that in attaining universal suffrage, we must act according to the constitutional framework. By constitutional design of the Basic Law, any change to our electoral system requires consensus among the three parties concerned, i.e. two-thirds majority support in the Legislative Council, consent of the Chief Executive, and endorsement by the National People's Congress Standing Committee.

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