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Government sincere in implementing universal suffrage

Commenting on the remarks made by Legislative Councillor Emily Lau on RTHK's "Letter to Hong Kong" broadcast today (August 26), a spokesman for the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau said the Government was as sincere as it was determined to implement universal suffrage in publishing the Green Paper on Constitutional Development. The Green Paper has been promulgated with the clear objective of identifying for the community a set of solutions on how and when universal suffrage should be implemented.

The spokesman said that to facilitate public discussion the Government had categorised the proposals received and presented them in the Green Paper as three types of options for implementing universal suffrage for electing the Chief Executive and for forming the Legislative Council. The key issues covered include the universal suffrage timetable, the composition and size of the nominating committee for the Chief Executive election, the number of candidates to be put forth for the Chief Executive election, as well as how the Legislative Council's functional constituency elections could be replaced.

"It is, therefore, wrong of Ms Lau to suggest that the Chief Executive Mr Donald Tsang's electoral promise on the subject 'will evaporate into thin air'," the spokesman said.

"The publication of the Green Paper has indeed delivered one of Mr Tsang's key electoral promises, and the fact that this was issued in just 11 days after inauguration of the third-term HKSAR Government underlines our commitment to deal with the issue of universal suffrage in accordance with the Basic Law," he said.

The spokesman also took issue with Ms Lau's suggestion that "the Green Paper exercise is nothing but a farce", pointing out that the public consultation exercise was being carried out widely and systematically.

"Meetings are arranged with legislators, the District Councils and different organisations and sectors of the community. We have also arranged open and regional forums to listen to public views. Members of the public are free to join the open forums," he said.

As for the functional constituencies, the spokesman said Ms Lau and the 22 Legislative Councillors of the opposition camp, who had proposed universal suffrage for the Legislative Council by 2012, should face up to the political reality that they still needed to secure an additional 18 votes, including some from the functional constituency representatives, in order to attain two-thirds majority support in the Legislative Council for their proposal.

"It will, therefore, not be sufficient merely to allege that the functional constituencies should be abolished. One

must act according to the constitutional requirements.

"It is also wrong to say that the Green Paper is 'ominously silent' regarding the nomination of candidates to stand for election as Chief Executive," he said.

"The Government has set out different views on the issue of 'democratic procedures' put forth by the Commission on Strategic Development and the community on the issue.

"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 for the Chief Executive. Thereafter, detailed nomination procedures can be discussed and agreed upon," he said.

As for Ms Lau's suggestion that Mr Tsang had stood for "small-circle election" in March, the spokesman pointed out that the Election Committee was broadly representative of the Hong Kong community. During the election, Mr Tsang received over 80 per cent of Election Committee votes. Likewise, he received 70 per cent public support as revealed by the opinion polls conducted by various universities. This demonstrates that the Election Committee is indeed broadly representative.

Turning to the District Council election in November and the Legislative Council's Hong Kong Island Geographical Constituency by-election, the spokesman said the Electoral Affairs Commission would ensure that both elections would be conducted in the finest tradition of being fair, open and just.

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