

**Introductory Remarks by
Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee,
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS,
at the First Public Hearing of the Committee
in respect of the Director of Audit's Report No. 52
on Tuesday, 5 May 2009**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee's public hearing relating to Report No. 52 of the Director of Audit on the results of value for money audits, which was tabled in the Legislative Council on 22 April 2009.

2. The Public Accounts Committee is a standing committee of the Legislative Council. It plays the role of a watchdog over public expenditure through consideration of the reports of the Director of Audit laid before the Council on the Government's accounts and the results of value for money audits of the Government and those organisations which receive funding from the Government. The consideration by the Committee of the Director's reports involves gathering evidence relevant to the facts contained in the Director's reports, so that the Committee may draw conclusions and make recommendations in a constructive spirit and forward-looking manner. I also wish to stress that the objective of the whole exercise is such that the lessons learned from past experience and our comments on the performance of the public officers or other personnel concerned will enable the Government to improve its control over the expenditure of public funds, with due regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

3. The consideration of the Director's reports follows an established process of public hearings where necessary, internal deliberations and publication of the Committee's report. The Committee has an established procedure for ensuring that the parties concerned have a reasonable opportunity to be heard. After the Committee is satisfied that it has ascertained the relevant facts, it will proceed to form its views on those facts, followed by a process of formulating its conclusions and recommendations to be included in its report. In accordance with Rule 72 of the Rules of Procedure of the Legislative Council, the Committee is required to make its report on the Director's report to the Legislative Council within three months of the date at which the Director's report is laid on the Table of the Council. Before then, we will not, as a committee or individually, be making any public comments.

4. Following a preliminary study of Report No. 52, the Committee has decided, in respect of three chapters in the Report, to invite the relevant public officers and other personnel concerned to appear before the Committee and answer our questions. We have, apart from this morning's hearing, also set aside 7 and 12 May 2009 for public hearings on the other chapters.

5. The public hearing this morning is on Chapter 3 of Report No. 52 on the subject of "Equal Opportunities Commission". The witnesses are: Mr Stephen LAM (Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs), Mr Raymond TAM (Under Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs), Mr Arthur HO (Deputy Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs), Mr Hubert LAW (Principal Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs), Mr Raymond TANG (Chairperson, Equal Opportunities Commission), and Mr Michael CHAN (Director (Planning and Administration), Mr Joseph LI (Director (Operations)), Mr Herman POON (Chief Legal Counsel), Dr Ferrick CHU (Head, Policy and Research), Ms Shana WONG (Head (Corporate Communications and Training)), and Miss Gloria YU (Senior Equal Opportunities Officer (Administration and Personnel)) of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

6. Please note that except for designated public officers, other persons are not covered by the protection and immunity provided under the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance (Cap. 382) when addressing the Committee.

7. I now proceed to the public hearing.