

**Opening Statement by
Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on 5 April 2016**

Chairman,

I wish to brief Members on the main points of the financial estimates of the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (“CMAB”) in 2016-17.

Estimates of Expenditure of CMAB

2. In 2016-17, CMAB is allocated \$608 million, which is \$21.8 million (about 3.7%) higher than the revised estimates for 2015-16. The financial provision is mainly used in the following areas-

(I) Electoral Arrangements

3. The Government will continue to work closely with the Electoral Affairs Commission (“EAC”) to ensure that the public elections will be conducted in a fair, open and honest manner in accordance with the relevant legislation.

2016 Legislative Council general election

4. The Legislative Council (“LegCo”) general election will be held on 4 September this year. The EAC has completed the public consultation on the “Proposed Guidelines on Election-related Activities in respect of the Legislative Council Election” on 1 April, and plans to issue the finalised guidelines in late June. Besides, the Registration and Electoral Office (“REO”) will brief the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs on the practical arrangements and publicity for the election later this month.

2016 Election Committee Subsector Elections and 2017 Chief Executive Election

5. The coming Election Committee subsector ordinary elections will be held on 11 December this year, while the fifth-term Chief

Executive election will be held on 26 March next year. REO will consult the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs on the proposed guidelines on election-related activities and the practical arrangements for the relevant elections.

2016 Voter Registration

6. The Government and EAC have along attached importance to maintaining the accuracy and completeness of the voter registration system. The statutory deadline for both voter registration and change of registration particulars this year is 2 May. The Government will organise a large-scale voter registration campaign through various channels, to encourage eligible persons to register as electors, and to remind electors to update their registration particulars. We also encourage electors to use the Online Voter Information Enquiry System recently launched to verify their registration status and personal particulars. The relevant publicity measures have already been commenced in early March. REO will continue to implement checking measures and inquiry process. If any person is reasonably suspected of providing false information for voter registration, REO will refer the case to the law enforcement agencies for follow up action and investigation in accordance with established procedures.

Public Consultation on Enhancement of Voter Registration System

7. The Consultation Report on Enhancement of Voter Registration System was released in January 2016. In the light of the outcome of the consultation, the EAC has made amendments to the relevant subsidiary legislations to advance the statutory deadline for change of registration particulars to the same statutory deadline for new registrations, and to change to use surface mail for all inquiries and notifications. The amendments have already come into effect on 18 March 2016. REO has also implemented the following administrative measures, including (i) strengthening the verification of address information with other government departments and other sources; (ii) increasing the use of other means for REO to communicate with electors, and (iii) enhancing public education and publicity on voter registration.

8. As regards the other proposed measures in the Consultation Report which involve legislation, including penalties on voter registration-related offences, review of the objection mechanism, time limit for processing objection cases, and requirement of address proofs, etc, they will be dealt with in the next term of the LegCo.

(II) Promoting the Basic Law

9. In 2016-17, CMAB will continue to set aside about \$16 million for organising or sponsoring various promotional activities via different means to enhance public awareness and understanding of “one country, two systems” and the Basic Law.

(III) Rights of the Individual

10. In 2016-17, subventions to the Equal Opportunities Commission (“EOC”) and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (“PCPD”) will remain the major parts of the estimated total provision in human rights under the Bureau. CMAB will continue to carry out promotional and educational work in certain areas.

Anti-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity

11. We established the Advisory Group on Eliminating Discrimination against Sexual Minorities (“Advisory Group”) in June 2013 to advise on matters relating to concerns about discrimination faced by sexual minorities. The Advisory Group has met various stakeholder groups, rendered advice on the conduct of the study on discrimination experienced by sexual minorities in Hong Kong, and looked into the experience in tackling discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in some other jurisdictions. The Advisory Group also submitted its report to the Government with recommendations on anti-discrimination strategies and measures in December 2015. The report of the Advisory Group was presented to the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs on 15 February this year. We are following up on the report and will maintain communication with stakeholders.

12. At the same time, EOC published the Report on Study on Legislation against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status in January this year.

13. We are studying the comments and recommendations contained in the two Reports mentioned above and will continue to listen to the views of stakeholders.

EOC and PCPD

14. The statutory function of the EOC is to be responsible for the implementation of the four anti-discrimination ordinances, including Sex

Discrimination Ordinance (Cap.480), Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap.487), Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (Cap.527) and Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap.602). The total subvention for the EOC in 2016-17 is \$107 million. The statutory function of the PCPD confines to enforcing the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. In 2016-17, we will allocate \$72.3 million to the PCPD.

15. We have received the EOC's report on the Discrimination Law Review. We note that the report covers a wide range of issues and contains a total of 73 recommendations, including 27 which were considered by the EOC to be higher priority issues. We also notice that the report contains some relatively complicated and sensitive issues, and the public have expressed strong and divergent views on these issues. We will carefully study the content of the report and consider how to follow up on the recommendations. We will also maintain communication with the EOC.

Promotion of Children's Rights

16. For promotion of children's rights, we have earmarked about \$1.07 million (excluding manpower cost) for implementing programmes for enhancing children's rights promotion in 2016-17. We will continue to promote children's rights through the Children's Rights Education Funding Scheme and the Children's Rights Forum.

(IV) Mainland Affairs and Co-operation with Taiwan

17. In 2016-17, the financial provision for the Mainland and Taiwan Offices is \$283.9 million, representing an increase of 10.6% when compared with the revised estimates for 2015-16, mainly due to the setting up of more liaison units in the Mainland and the increase of dedicated staff in the Mainland Offices.

Expanding network of Mainland Offices

18. The SAR Government currently has five Mainland Offices and five liaison units established in the eastern, southern, western, northern and central region. To further enhance the network of our Mainland Offices and provide better support service to Hong Kong people, we plan to set up six additional liaison units. We plan to set up one liaison unit each in Changsha City of Hunan Province and Zhengzhou City of Henan Province under the Wuhan Economic and Trade Office ("ETO") and another one in Tianjin Municipality under the

Beijing Office (“BJO”) in 2016-17. Thereafter, we plan to set up one liaison unit each under the Guangdong ETO, Shanghai ETO and Chengdu ETO in 2017.

Enhancing functions of Mainland Offices

19. To further enhance the functions of the Mainland Offices, we plan to set up an Immigration Division under the Shanghai ETO in 2016-17 to provide better support for Hong Kong residents in distress in the Mainland. We will also deploy dedicated cultural staff to the BJO to strengthen the promotion of cultural exchange and co-operation with the Mainland.

National Five-Year Plans

20. The Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan¹ was promulgated officially on 17 March this year. A chapter is again dedicated to Hong Kong and Macao (“the Dedicated Chapter”), which not only reaffirms the strong support of the Central Authorities for Hong Kong in maintaining long-term prosperity and stability, but also acknowledges the significant functions and positioning of Hong Kong in the overall development of the country, as well as the scope and opportunities for development in a number of key areas. The Dedicated Chapter expresses clear support for Hong Kong in leveraging our unique advantages to enhance our role and functions in the country’s economic development and opening up to other countries. In line with the policy of “what the country needs, what Hong Kong is good at”, the SAR Government would continue to fully demonstrate its role as the “super-connector” for the country and implement the various policy initiatives that are related to Hong Kong to ensure that Hong Kong would firmly grasp these new opportunities in the coming five years. The Dedicated Chapter also emphasizes on the need to enhance the co-operation with the Mainland, Hong Kong and Macao.

Regional Co-operation

Co-operation with the Guangdong Province

21. The Guangdong Province has been the most important co-operation partner of Hong Kong in terms of regional co-operation. At the 21st Working Meeting of the Hong Kong/Guangdong Co-operation Joint Conference held on 23 March this year, both sides formulated the

¹ The full name is the “Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China”

“2016 Work Plan” of the Guangdong-Hong Kong co-operation to foster collaboration in a number of areas including the Belt and Road Initiative, innovation and technology, key co-operation regions (including Qianhai, Nansha and Hengqin), liberalisation of trade in services, youth, financial services, professional services, environmental protection, tourism and education.

Qianhai, Nansha and Hengqin

22. It was also proposed in the Dedicated Chapter to “expedite the development of co-operation platforms among Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao such as Qianhai, Nansha and Hengqin.” The SAR Government supports the future development of the three regions and will, under the principle of “one country, two systems”, continue to strengthen exchanges and co-operation with the Guangdong Provincial Government, as well as the Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai Municipal Governments, to enhance the partnerships with the Guangdong Province and the three regions, as well as to work together to expedite the development of the three regions as co-operation platforms among Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao so as to provide Hong Kong people and enterprises greater potential and opportunities for development.

Co-operation with Shenzhen

23. On Hong Kong and Shenzhen co-operation, at the Hong Kong/Shenzhen Co-operation Meeting held on 29 February this year, both sides agreed to take forward co-operation for the following key areas in the coming year, including innovation and technology, Qianhai Development, creative industries, professional services, financial services and youth co-operation.

Co-operation with Pan-Pearl River Delta Region

24. The Dedicated Chapter also makes clear for the first time the support of the Central People’s Government for Hong Kong and Macao to play an important role in the Pan-Pearl River Delta (“PPRD”) Region co-operation. We will make use of the existing co-operation platforms to strengthen the exchanges and co-operation with PPRD region, Shanghai Municipality, and Beijing Municipality. We will endeavour to give full play to Hong Kong’s unique advantages of “one country” and “two systems” as well as the extensive and strong international connections to promote the co-operation with the Mainland and Hong Kong and the mutual development of regions/provinces/municipalities, and to open up business opportunities for Hong Kong industries.

Co-operation with Fujian Province

25. The SAR Government will continue to utilise the platform of Hong Kong-Fujian Co-operation Conference, with a view to further strengthening the co-operation with Fujian and promoting development of both places. The First Hong Kong-Fujian Co-operation Conference was co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Vice-Governor of Fujian Province in January last year. The second Conference will be held on 15 April this year.

Co-operation with Macao

26. At the last Hong Kong Macao Co-operation High Level Meeting held in July last year, the two sides agreed to focus on collaboration in respect of the negotiation work for the Hong Kong and Macao Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (HK-Macao CEPA), e-government, financial services, cross-boundary traffic arrangements upon the opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, environmental protection, cultural co-operation and youth in the coming year. The next meeting will be held in mid-2016.

Development of Hong Kong – Taiwan Relations

27. Hong Kong and Taiwan continue to promote exchanges and co-operation on various fronts such as economic and trade, culture, tourism, social livelihood and city management through the two non-official platforms “Hong Kong-Taiwan Economic and Cultural Cooperation and Promotion Council” and the “Taiwan-Hong Kong Economic and Cultural Co-operation Council”. In addition, our “Hong Kong Economic, Trade and Cultural Office” in Taiwan will continue to promote Hong Kong through organising and participating in various activities.

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau
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