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**Panel on Security**

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council  
Secretariat  
for the meeting on 6 December 2016**

**Results of Study of Matters Raised in the Annual Report  
to the Chief Executive by the Commissioner  
on Interception of Communications and Surveillance**

**Purpose**

This paper summarizes past discussions by the Panel on Security ("the Panel") on the results of study of matters raised in the annual reports to the Chief Executive ("CE") by the Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance ("the Commissioner").

**Background**

2. Under section 49 of the Interception of Communications and Surveillance Ordinance (Cap. 589) ("ICSO"), the Commissioner shall, for each report period, submit a report to CE. The report is to be submitted within six months after the expiry of the report period. CE shall cause a copy of the report to be laid on the table of the Legislative Council ("LegCo").

3. In the course of examination of the Interception of Communications and Surveillance Bill in 2006, the Administration undertook, inter alia, to report to the Panel the results of the Administration's study of matters raised in the Commissioner's annual report to CE.

## **Deliberations of the Panel**

4. Since the commencement of ICSO on 9 August 2006, annual reports had been submitted by the Commissioner to CE. The results of the Administration's study of matters raised in the annual reports have been discussed at a number of Panel meetings and the deliberations are summarized below.

### Compliance with the statutory requirements among officers of the law enforcement agencies

5. Some members were concerned that law enforcement officers were unfamiliar with the rules and procedures of the ICSO regime. Some members were of the view that sufficient training on the requirements in ICSO should be provided to newly appointed as well as existing staff, including those at the supervisory level.

6. According to the Administration, in response to the recommendations in the reports of the Commissioner, numerous revisions had been made to the Code of Practice ("CoP") in the past few years. The Administration was aware of the importance of getting existing and newly appointed ISCO-related law enforcement officers familiar with requirements under ICSO and CoP, including any new requirements. In this connection, the law enforcement agencies ("LEAs") concerned had been directed to provide appropriate induction training and refresher training for relevant officers.

7. Members noted that frontline and supervisory level law enforcement officers newly appointed to perform listening duties were provided with induction training, which covered the operation of the listening system, practical listening techniques, the conditions imposed by panel judges on prescribed authorizations and legal professional privilege ("LPP"). Training packages had been developed to enhance the knowledge of law enforcement officers in the requirements in ICSO and facilitate the adoption of a proper and prudent attitude towards ICSO-related matters.

### Prevention of abuse of power by law enforcement officers

8. While noting that interception of communications and covert surveillance was critical to the combating of serious crime, some members expressed concern about the possibility of abuse of power by LEAs.

9. Members were advised that under ICSO, all interception required the prescribed authorization of a panel judge. When making an application for a prescribed authorization, an LEA applicant had to submit with his application an affidavit or written statement on his assessment of the likelihood of involvement of LPP to a panel judge for issue of a prescribed authorization. Whenever there were any subsequent changes which might affect the assessment, the LEA concerned had to notify the panel judge, who would determine whether the prescribed authorization should continue and if so, whether any additional conditions needed to be imposed. LEAs were required to submit reports within specified time limits to the Commissioner, who monitored the compliance of LEAs with ICSO. Where there were cases of non-compliance or irregularity, follow-up actions were taken by LEAs in accordance with the established mechanisms of the LEAs concerned having regard to the Commissioner's advice and recommendations. Where disciplinary actions were to be taken against the officers concerned, the LEAs concerned would take into account the views of the Commissioner, if any, before actions were taken against the officers concerned.

10. Some members were of the view that more information on cases of non-compliance and irregularities should be disclosed in the Commissioner's annual reports. Members were advised that the Commissioner had highlighted in his annual reports his continued practice of providing the utmost transparency of his work, while taking care not to divulge any information the disclosure of which might prejudice the prevention or detection of crime or the protection of public security.

Protection of information subject to legal professional privilege and privacy of members of the public

11. Concern was raised over the increasing number of requests for interception of communication by LEAs where information obtained was or likely to be subject to LPP while the Commissioner could not verify the cases.

12. According to the Administration, LEAs were required to notify the Commissioner of operations that were likely to involve LPP information or where LPP information had been obtained inadvertently. An LEA applicant was required to state his assessment of LPP likelihood in his affidavit or statement in support of his application. At the request of the Commissioner, all intercept products and related records had been preserved to enable him and his designated staff to check cases of special interest or chosen at random and there was an audit trail record for all

access to the intercept products. To avoid being criticized for operating above the law, the Commissioner had chosen not to listen to the intercept products until relevant amendments to ICSO had been enacted.

13. Some members expressed the view that law enforcement officers should under no circumstances be allowed to listen to any communication between a client and a law firm. Law enforcement officers who listened to such communication should be prosecuted under ICSO.

14. According to the Administration, LPP was protected by the common law and Article 35 of the Basic Law, which guaranteed that "Hong Kong residents shall have the right to confidential legal advice". ICSO did not preclude LEAs from intercepting the communications of a lawyer provided that the interception was carried out pursuant to a prescribed authorization in accordance with the requirements in ICSO. In relation to the protection of LPP in ICSO, section 3 of ICSO required the consideration of all relevant circumstances and the balancing of competing interests, including the protection of privacy and LPP, in the issue, renewal or continuance of a prescribed authorization. Schedule 3 to ICSO also required LEAs to assess the likelihood of obtaining LPP information when making an application for interception. Under ICSO, no prescribed authorization might contain terms that authorize the interception of communications by reference to any telecommunications service used at an office or other relevant premises, or a residence, of a lawyer unless exceptional circumstances existed. Section 62 of ICSO further guaranteed that "Any information that is subject to legal professional privilege is to remain privileged notwithstanding that it has been obtained pursuant to a prescribed authorization". Administrative measures were in place supplementing the statutory safeguards.

#### Cases involving journalistic material

15. Some members were concerned whether a prescribed authorization would be granted, if an LEA applicant indicated at the time of application that journalistic material ("JM") would be obtained. Concern was also raised about the possibility of cases where an application for a prescribed authorization was submitted without informing the panel judge that JM would likely be obtained.

16. According to the Administration, there was no question of an LEA submitting an application for a prescribed authorization without informing the panel judge if JM would likely be obtained. ICSO required an applicant to set out, at the time of applying for a prescribed authorization, the likelihood that any information which might be the contents of any JM would be obtained by carrying out the interception or

covert surveillance sought to be authorized. LEAs were required to notify the panel judges of cases where information which might be the contents of any JM had been obtained.

#### Commissioner's power and authority to listen to interception product

17. The Panel noted the recommendation of the first Commissioner for empowering him and staff designated by him to examine intercept and covert surveillance products. The Commissioner considered that the provision of such power for himself and his designated staff to listen to and inspect intercept and surveillance products would serve as a strong deterrent against malpractice or concealment.

18. Members noted that the Interception of Communications and Surveillance (Amendment) Bill 2015, which proposed, among other things, empowering the Commissioner to require LEAs to provide protected products for his checking, was passed at the Council meeting of 16 June 2016.

#### Documentation requirement on cases of non-compliance

19. Noting from a non-compliance case in which three officers involved did not remember the exact date of discovering the mistake, some members raised queries over the absence of any written records of the internal communications among different ranks regarding the case. Information was sought on whether there was any requirement within LEAs on the keeping of records in government departments to facilitate internal monitoring and checking by the Commissioner.

20. According to the Administration, the Government Records Service had formulated records management procedures and guidelines to ensure proper management of government records. Policy bureaux and government departments, including LEAs, should create and capture adequate but not excessive records to meet operational, policy, legal and financial purposes. While the code of practice provided a general overview on record management, under the ICSO regime, LEAs were further required to follow the Commissioner's more stringent requirements in reporting on cases of irregularity or non-compliance. All written documents and file records of such cases would need to be preserved for inspection by the Commissioner, in addition to a full investigation report on each of such incidents.

### Statistics relating to ICSO

21. Some members were concerned about a lack of breakdown in the statistics provided in the annual reports between cases involving serious crime and those involving public security. Given the lack of such a breakdown in the annual reports and the absence of a definition of "public security" in ICSO, these members expressed concern about the possibility of interception for political monitoring.

22. According to the Administration, there was no question of interception for political monitoring. Under ICSO, a prescribed authorization had to be granted by a panel judge in fulfilment of the objectives of the operation as prescribed under section 3 of ICSO.

23. Some members expressed concern that the ratio of the number of persons arrested as a result of or further to interception or covert surveillance carried out pursuant to prescribed authorizations to the number of prescribed authorizations issued had decreased in 2012, 2013 and 2014. They queried whether this was the result of LEAs embarking on "fishing expedition" in the investigation of crime in recent years, which would pose a threat to the privacy of the general public.

24. According to the Administration, there was no question of LEAs embarking on "fishing expedition" in the investigation of crime. There was no correlation between the number of prescribed authorizations and the number of persons arrested as a result of or further to interception or covert surveillance carried out pursuant to prescribed authorizations. An application for prescribed authorization was considered by a panel judge having regard to the proportionality and necessity of the operations concerned.

### **Relevant papers**

25. A list of relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on  
Results of Study of Matters Raised in the Annual Report  
to the Chief Executive by the Commissioner  
on Interception of Communications and Surveillance**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Security	6.11.2007 (Item V)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	6.12.2007 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	16.2.2009 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	3.3.2009 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	7.12.2009 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	6.7.2010 (Item III)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	29.11.2010 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	5.12.2011 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	3.1.2012 (Item VI)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Legislative Council	18.1.2012	<u>Motion on "Annual Report 2010 to the Chief Executive by the Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance"</u>
Panel on Security	4.12.2012 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Security	2.7.2013 (Item III)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	3.12.2013 (Item III)	<a href="#"><u>Agenda</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Minutes</u></a>
Panel on Security	2.12.2014 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Security	1.12.2015 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>

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