

Press Release

SCA speaks on discussions at Governance and Political Development
Development Committee meeting

Following is the transcript of a media briefing given by the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, Mr Stephen Lam, after the meeting of the Committee on Governance and Political Development of the Commission on Strategic Development (CSD) this afternoon (November 23) (English portion):

Reporter: Are there any new points, progress on choosing the method of elections?

Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: We have made some progress today, both with respect to the universal suffrage arrangements for returning the Chief Executive (CE) and with regard to universal suffrage for the Legislative Council (LegCo).

On the front of universal suffrage for returning the CE, all are basically agreed that we should establish a nominating committee in accordance with the Basic Law. As to the size of the nominating committee, most members are focusing on the range of 800 members to 1,600 members. There are of course suggestions that perhaps we should also consider other options such as allowing the 60 members of the LegCo to form the nominating committee.

As regards the level of support required for a candidate to be nominated, basically most members of the Commission are now focusing on the range of one-eighth to one-quarter support among the members of the nominating committee.

As for universal suffrage for returning the LegCo, the most important point made today is that perhaps we should consider implementing universal suffrage in phases. But this is a relatively new idea which was proposed only in the recent meetings, focused more at this particular meeting and attracted more discussions. I think, in January when the Commission meets again, we would need to expand the discussion and focus more on the detailed aspects of this particular idea.

Reporter: What kind of phases?

Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: You are probably aware that Mr James Tien on behalf of the Liberal Party suggested that maybe attaining universal suffrage for the LegCo should be implemented in three phases. Various members of the opposition camp today, including Mr Lee Wing-tat and Mr Lee Cheuk-yan, both expressed the notion that if there was a specific timetable for attaining universal suffrage for the LegCo, perhaps this could be explored further.

Reporter: Is it your view or the Government's view that any discussion of timing, phases, sequencing whatever, but it is out of sequence if you have already determined what the composition and form of the legislature would be?

Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: I think at this stage, it is helpful that there are suggestions made by different members of the Commission as to how we can approach and make progress

for attaining universal suffrage for the LegCo. First and foremost, it is the most important political reality that there are 30 seats comprising functional constituencies in our LegCo. And whatever models for attaining universal suffrage that we put forth, we have to ensure that we secure two-thirds majority in the LegCo. It is therefore very necessary for whichever political party that put forth a proposition to secure that level of support. We do need to make sure that whatever models we put forward will be acceptable to both geographical constituency legislators and functional constituency legislators and at the same time we attain universal suffrage as the ultimate aim.

Reporter: My question is simply, is it or is it not in proper sequence to be discussing the timing when you have not resolved, whether it be unicameral, bicameral system before you the question of the timetable, in your or in the Government's view?

Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: Our view is that we should focus on the models for attaining universal suffrage and the road map before we make any firm decisions on the question of timetable. We also pointed out previously that it is necessary for us to attain consensus on models for attaining universal suffrage and the road map. Then naturally the timetable will fall into place and therefore if any particular member of the Commission proposes a phasing-in of universal suffrage for the LegCo, that constitutes a proposal with regard to the road map.

Reporter: This seems terribly incremental to say the least. How would you characterise the progress so far?

Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: I think we have made progress in the sense that we have narrowed differences among different political parties and members of the Commission. For a start, we have decided to set to one side any further discussions or explorations about bicameralism. Secondly, different members of the Commission are now focusing on possibilities for forming a nominating committee ranging from 800 members to 1,600 members and the nomination threshold of one-eighth to one quarter. That makes it more possible for us to attain consensus for attaining universal suffrage.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript)

Ends/Thursday, November 23, 2006
Issued at HKT 21:39

NNNN