

SJ appeals for support for 2012 constitutional reform

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Wong Yan Lung, SC, appealed for public support for the proposals in the 2012 constitutional reform today (May 31), following the launch of the "Act Now" campaign.

Addressing representatives of NGOs and tertiary institutions as well as students at the Citi Community Intern Programme recognition ceremony, Mr Wong said that the ultimate goal of universal suffrage could only be achieved by consensus and in compliance with the legal procedure.

"We truly believe we have reached a critical moment, and how we fare this time will significantly affect the well-being of this community," he said.

"In December 2007, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the highest authority of our country, has given us a timetable for universal suffrage. We can elect our Chief Executive (CE) by universal suffrage in 2017 and all members of the Legislative Council (LegCo) by universal suffrage in 2020. This is undeniably the most significant breakthrough in the constitutional development of Hong Kong," he added.

Mr Wong stressed that the proposals in the 2012 constitutional reform were unquestionably a move in the right direction, with an increase in the democratic element in both elections.

Following are the objective justifications in support of the reform package:

- As regards the CE election, the Election Committee will become more representative with its members increasing from 800 to 1,200. Further, three-quarters of the 100 new seats in the political sector of the Election Committee will be allocated to elected District Council members.

- As regards the LegCo election, total seats will increase from 60 to 70.

- Of the additional 10 seats, five will be returned by direct geographical elections, and the other five (together with the existing one seat returned by District Council) will be returned by elected District Council

members.

- Elected District Council members are returned by 3.3 million voters. If the proposal is implemented, in effect, almost 60% of the 70 LegCo seats will be returned by geographical constituencies directly or indirectly. This compares with the present ratio of only 50% of all LegCo seats returned by geographical constituencies.

- Correspondingly the ratio of traditional functional constituency (FC) seats will decline from 50% to 40%. These changes will help foster greater consensus as to how to deal with functional constituencies eventually.

"Voting for the 2012 proposals and seeking the ultimate goal of universal suffrage for 2017 and 2020 are two separate matters. Also, voting for the 2012 proposals does not prejudice the continual quest by some for abolition of the FC seats and clarification of the universal suffrage principles.

"Instead, reaching consensus and moving on now can only put us in a better position to resolve the issues because of greater consensus and greater democratic elements in the next LegCo," Mr Wong said.

Mr Wong said if the 2012 proposals were voted down, it would mean the waste of 10 years with absolutely zero progress.

"Although passing the proposals now is not a prerequisite for the universal suffrage timetable, voting them down will undermine the prospects of reaching consensus in the next rounds of political reform.

"Further, if the voting down of the proposals worsens the polarisation of the Hong Kong community, all of us will have to pay a very hefty price," Mr Wong added.

Ends/Monday, May 31, 2010