Transcript of interview on ATV’s Newsline with CE

Following is the transcript of an interview on ATV’s Newsline with the Chief Executive, Mr C Y Leung, today (October 19):

Host: Good evening this is Newsline. I’m Michael Chugani. Tonight, a very special guest indeed. Mr Chief Executive C Y Leung.

CE: Good Evening, Michael.

Host: Thank you Mr Leung. I know these are very trying times for Hong Kong, so thank you for taking the time out to do this interview with us on Newsline. Maybe you notice, the audience notices, we are here in Government House, not in your regular office in Admiralty, because that was some days ago you were prevented from going there. As the Chief Executive of Hong Kong do you find it humiliating, or not right, that you cannot even go to your office?

CE: We’ve been exercising maximum tolerance and patience. You know that to work out a solution, to put an end to this problem, we need time. We need time to talk to the people, particularly young students, who are occupying the main thoroughfares of Hong Kong… (Host: You don’t mind not being able to…) I don’t mind. I don’t mind at all. What I want is to see a peaceful and a meaningful end to this problem.

Host: Wait, a peaceful and a meaningful end. It’s been going on now for 22 days. We saw in the past two nights in Mong Kok, those confrontations were anything but peaceful, as you know. Each side is blaming the other side. The protesters are blaming you, Mr C Y Leung, the Chief Executive, and the Government and the Police for provoking the violence. And people are saying that you as the Chief Executive had failed in your duty to rule and to govern Hong Kong effectively. Would you say you have failed?

CE: As the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, I have the constitutional duty to govern Hong Kong according to the laws of Hong Kong which include the Basic Law … (Host: which I see you have right there.) Yes, I have it right with me because it is important to keep Hong Kong a law-abiding society and that we uphold the rule of law in Hong Kong.
You talked about Mong Kok. As we all know, Mong Kok is not exactly the most genteel part of Hong Kong. Hong Kong generally speaking has a very low and falling crime rate but by comparison I have to say, by comparison, Mong Kok is different, and the forces, political or otherwise, operating in Mong Kok are very different, too. Now, Mong Kok is not the only district that the Police managed to clear the roads in, in the past week. The Police managed to clear certain roads in Central, Queensway, and Causeway Bay and so on, and the Police did not meet with the kind of disturbance afterwards that you mentioned. So Mong Kok is a very different situation. And as far as the Police are concerned, again, they have the duty …(Host: But you don’t accept that you have ruled Hong Kong, governed Hong Kong ineffectively?) Well we need to look at the root… (Host: and you have divided society?) We need to look at the root of the problem. The dispute is over the method of selecting Chief Executive in 2017.

Let me put this on record, particularly for part of the community who are not that familiar with the Basic Law. And I might just add that in the past three weeks, people, ordinary people of Hong Kong who were out there in the streets that are occupied by the students and other people, have talked to them, talked to the occupiers, and asked them what do you think is the problem. They somehow feel that universal suffrage has been denied by the National People’s Congress Standing Committee’s decision which is not the case. To the contrary, the National People’s Congress Standing Committee decided on the 31st of August in their decision to give Hong Kong universal suffrage according to the Basic Law. Now, do the Central Authorities, the National People’s Congress, have the power? It is not a power taken away from Hong Kong, it’s the power specified in the Basic Law. Annex One in the Basic Law says, I promise I’ll just quote this article in the Basic Law very quickly: “If there is a need to amend the method for selecting the Chief Executives for the terms subsequent to the year 2007, such amendments must be made with the endorsement of a two-thirds majority of all the members of the Legislative Council and the consent of the Chief Executive and they shall be reported to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress for approval.” So the Standing Committee of the NPC does have the power to approve or not to approve, much in the same way as the one-third minority of LegCo having the power of passing or not passing such a resolution. So it is not exactly a Hong Kong government matter. It’s a matter between the Legislative Council and
the National People’s Congress. People have to understand this.

When I came to office, I took an oath. In my oath, I swore to uphold the laws of Hong Kong, including the Basic Law. The reason why I wanted to take some of your time to read out this paragraph from the Basic Law to remind the people that we need to go forward to implement universal suffrage according to the Basic Law and relevant NPCSC decisions.

Host: Now Mr Chief Executive you said that you have quoted the Basic Law here but the message that the world community now sees is that a communist government in China has denied HK what is now being described as genuine or true democracy. Now, most people or many people in HK, you cannot deny, feel that their wishes for genuine democracy have been overruled by the National People’s Congress.

CE: The students, or the students who took up occupation in part of Hong Kong, and their supporters, have defined genuine universal suffrage as universal suffrage that has civic nomination. Now, civic nomination is not provided for in the Basic Law. In fact, the legal professions in Hong Kong have categorically stated quite a few months ago that civic nomination is not in keeping with the provisions of the Basic Law, because the Basic Law says that universal suffrage will be implemented in Hong Kong upon nomination by a nominating committee and this is what the National People’s Congress Standing Committee has said in their decision on 31st of August. So we have a situation where one side wants civic nomination and the Basic Law doesn’t allow for it. And therefore some students have actually come up to say that we should amend the Basic Law. Now we all know … (Host: That’s never gonna happen.) Ever since the Basic Law was promulgated in 1990 and came into force in 1997, it has not been amended.

Host: Well that’s fine, but why is it, Mr Chief Executive, that the National People’s Congress, the Central Government, they know the wishes of people in Hong Kong, they have seen for the past three weeks what has happened in Hong Kong. Why is it so difficult for them to say “No, we will stand by our ruling”, as you pointed out, “on August 31st,” instead of listening to HK people and say “All right, if that is what you want, we will change it”?

CE: A constitutional reform of this nature and scale is pretty unprecedented in
Hong Kong and the world at large, and we could expect controversies. As you said, the Central Authorities, including the Central People’s Government and the National People Congress, are fully aware of the very different views in different sectors of the community. The students’ views are not the only views in Hong Kong. If you read the report submitted to the Central People’s Government by the Hong Kong government at the end of the five-month long consultation, you see very, very different views. But the students and their supporters have taken to the streets of Hong Kong, literally speaking, to drive home their very strong message, that they want civic nomination … (Host: That’s not the only thing they want. They want to have a system where they feel that they have a genuine choice in selecting candidates to become Chief Executive) Michael, it is a very major part of what they want, civic nomination. And they said without civic nomination, then the two or three candidates that will face the electorate in 2017 would not be the candidates they want.

Host: Can you appease them to a certain extent, Mr Chief Executive? They have also said that, “Please, please, you have seen what has happened in Hong Kong, please, please send another report reflecting what has happened to Hong Kong.” I can’t see any reason why you cannot do that, it doesn’t have to be part of the five-part process for constitutional reform in Hong Kong, just send a report and say “OK, the people of Hong Kong have occupied many places, they are very angry, they want a genuine choice, please listen.”

CE: It is a very difficult decision. (Host: Why is it difficult to send a report?) It might sound easy to you, or to the students. But already we have heard other sectors in Hong Kong saying, what about our views, we have new ideas, too. Or, if you send a supplementary report covering the views of one sector in Hong Kong, what about ours? Why don’t you highlight our views as well? We have to go forward, and I think it is important for the students and their supporters to realise that when we carry out the second round of consultation on the basis of the NPC Standing Committee’s decision on the 31st of August, there will be plenty of room for us to talk about how we can structure a nomination system so that we have genuine choice of candidates come 2017. The decision handed down by the NPCSC is only a framework decision, and we have lots of areas where we need to talk about, as to, for example, the actual composition of the nominating committee and the method of electing members onto this committee.
Host: But you know you have said that there are two things that you have made very clear. There will not be another report to the National People’s Congress, that you have to stick to the National People’s Congress’s decision, you must stick to the Basic Law. You have said these things over and over again. There will be a dialogue with the students on Tuesday. Carrie Lam, the Chief Secretary (for Administration) will be there. If that’s what you have said, and the students have said and you pointed out that they want civic nomination. Then I cannot see how the two of you can come together, and find a solution to these problems that we are having now.

CE: I want to listen to the students face-to-face. This is why a face-to-face dialogue is important.

Host: But that’s not going to produce anything.

CE: Well we are hopeful that we will produce anything, and that’s why we want…

Host: But you would not yield on your position.

CE: We cannot turn something that is not lawful in the Basic Law into a lawful exercise. It is very important that we do not put aside the Basic Law, because the Basic Law is the foundation of Hong Kong’s return to China and the foundation of the “One Country, Two Systems” principle.

Host: So now if there is not going to be … I feel that there is not going to be any progress. If there isn’t any progress, well, today, it’s the 22nd day that we have this Occupy movement, can you sit here now and guarantee, I am not talking about the People’s Liberation Army, I’m talking about, can you sit here and guarantee and tell the people of Hong Kong that there would not be a violent crackdown?

CE: On Monday, which is about a week ago, we had intelligence. We saw the early actions of that plan, a plan on a certain part of Hong Kong to clear Queensway by themselves. It would be an action against the occupiers in Queensway. It was going to be a large-scale action … (Host: By who?) … and serious clashes, by for example the transport sector. Heavy vehicles were
being deployed, so on and so forth. And luckily the Police managed to clear Queensway, reopened the road in Queensway in time to avoid this from happening. So, it isn’t just a question of whether the Police or the Hong Kong Government want to clear or reopen these roads, it is also a question of preventing clashes between part of the community. We saw that in Mong Kok and we just stopped it from...

Host: We will just stop for a moment here. More of Newsline soon. Don’t go away.

Host: Thanks for staying with Newsline. This is Michael Chugani, and I’ve got with me Mr C Y Leung, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Now Mr Chief Executive, I was just asking you before the break, I am not talking about the PLA, I am just saying, you know, it’s gone off for 22 days now. Can you say here and now that whatever happens, there would not be a violent Police crackdown on the demonstrators?

CE: In the past three weeks and going on, as much as possible, the Hong Kong government and the Police Force have exercised extreme tolerance and patience. That’s what we have done and what we will continue to do. (Host: You will continue to do?) We will continue to do that. But at the same time I have to say this. Both the Hong Kong government and the Police have a responsibility to uphold the law of Hong Kong. I don’t know how many rounds there will be with the students. They have requested multiple rounds of dialogue and how long these multiple rounds of dialogue will take. But there are three things that I stated a few days ago in the stand-up press conference that the Hong Kong government would have to do in parallel. One is to restore law and order in Hong Kong as soon as possible, which is important for other parts of the community as well. We are, after all, serving the entire community. Secondly, to engage the students in a face-to-face dialogue which we will do on Tuesday. Thirdly, we want to go forward with the implementation of universal suffrage in 2017, and therefore would like to go ahead with the second round of consultation to achieve that in the last quarter of this year.

Host: So you haven’t answered the question. Will there be a violent crackdown? You say multiple rounds of talks. You have to observe law and order in Hong Kong. How do you do that? Will the Police one day say, okay,
enough is enough, it’s gone off for too long? How long can you tolerate this?

CE: I shan’t use the word crackdown. The Police have been put into a rather impossible position. They have an impossible job to do, maintaining law and order in the neighbourhoods that are being affected. And the last thing we want to see is clash between people in the neighbourhoods … (Host: But you have to clear the roads one day soon.) in the neighbourhoods that hold different views on the question of Occupy Central.

Host: But you have to clear the streets one day soon, right?

CE: As I said it’s a matter of time, and so far, as far as I am concerned in going forward, we will continue to exercise the kind of patience and tolerance that we had in the last three weeks.

Host: You know a Chinese Mainland official Wang Yang did say that this was a colour revolution fermented by external forces. I know you have said this is not a colour revolution. Many people, especially the Mainland officials, have said that external forces are behind this. Do you have any proof whatsoever that external forces are behind this?

CE: There is obviously participation by people, organisations from outside of Hong Kong, in politics in Hong Kong, over a long time. This is not the only time when they do it, and this is not an exception either.

Host: So you are saying that there are external forces involved in this whole movement?

CE: There are external forces, yes.

Host: From which country?

CE: From different countries in different parts of the world. I shan’t go into details, but this is not entirely a domestic movement.

Host: So this movement, you say, is being in many ways, in some ways controlled by external forces?
CE: I shouldn’t use the word “control”. (Host: instigated?) No one can now control the movement. I have said that this is a political movement that has gone out of hand (Host: control. But Mr Wang Yang said it is a colour revolution) It’s gone out of control even for the people who started it, for people who planned it, for people who scripted it. You now see them still writing articles about it or appearing in some neighbourhoods that have been occupied and talked to the people as recent as last night. But they cannot end the movement which is a major concern.

Host: So you have said that it is a movement that has spun out of control. Mr Wang Yang said it is a colour revolution. Is there a disagreement between you and the Central Government?

CE: Well this is how I see things in Hong Kong. It was started in the form of an article in January last year. The whole thing developed and took on its own life. And then on September 28, we saw obvious signs, people started it could not control it.

Host: OK. The last time I had you on this show, Mr Chief Executive, you had told me that you planned to run in 2017. That’s now miles and miles ago, long time ago. Things have changed dramatically. You have said now that your resignation will not solve anything because people are saying you should resign and you said that that’s not going to solve the problem at all. I agree with you. But can you say now, as a sweetener to the people of Hong Kong, that you will not run in 2017?

CE: I am afraid I have to correct you, Michael. I don’t think I said I would run in 2017. No one will declare. (Host: You did say that.) No, I don’t, I didn’t and I haven’t been saying that at all. No candidate will declare his candidature… how many years? … three years in advance of any election. It’s not the thing that’s on my mind.

Host: Will you run in 2017? If you say you won’t run, many people will be very happy, and say, alright that’s a sweetener to them.

CE: I don’t think anyone will answer that kind of question. No candidate for any election that takes place in three years’ time will say so. (Host: so you are not ruling out that you will run?) I will not answer your question. (Host: You
are not running?) I am not giving you an answer.

Host: Alright, okay. So your popularity, as you know, has been quite low, and it’s been lower than that of the previous two Chief Executives. Why do you think it’s so? People say you are a polarising figure, you are a divisive figure. Do you see yourself as a polarizing figure?

CE: No, I don’t. Not at all. In fact, I have achieved quite a few things, particularly in the relations between Hong Kong and the Mainland, Hong Kong and the Central Authorities. I probably have to do more in communicating, probably I’ll have to come up more to your programme.

Host: How do you feel that you have failed in communicating with the people of Hong Kong? Why do you think that your popularity rating is always so low. Why do you feel that people find you, if I may use the word, not a very likeable person?

CE: Well, if you look at the question of housing, for example. We all know how long it takes to produce a housing unit, probably anything up to five years. I came to the office two years ago when the supply of housing was already very short…

Host: I know you’ve done a lot of things for housing and other social issues.

CE: Yes, and I need to talk to people a bit more to make sure that people understand that we need to make hard choices, for example, in producing developed land, so that we can build housing units on them. And that we have to strike a balance for example between maintaining low density, looking after environment, looking after landscape and cityscape and so on and so forth, and at the same time increasing housing supply. Now, these are important but difficult choices. Now, I did not decide to run for this position knowing that it’s smooth and sailing because Hong Kong wasn’t getting smooth and sailing.

Host: Would you run again if you know what’s going to happen? Would you have run had you have known that this is going to happen?

CE: Yes, I would.
Host: You would have run.

CE: Yes, I would.

Host: Even if you know all these will go to happen, you would have run?

CE: Yes, because Hong Kong needed help, Hong Kong needs help, and Hong Kong will continue to need help. I’m not the kind of person who would shrug off challenges. I’m not the kind of person who will sit on my hands and say, “Hey, let’s paper over the cracks and let the next guy deal with it.

Host: I want to ask you a couple more questions. I’m running out of time. How do you think the Central Government now views Hong Kong after all these that had happened? Will they view Hong Kong in a different way? Will they feel that the dream of democracy would have even been lessened because they see that this had happened in Hong Kong?

CE: Well, Hong Kong is a very transparent society. And the Central Government, including the National People’s Congress which handed out the August decision, are very much on top of the situation. And they are fully aware of what’s happening in Hong Kong and the reasons behind the events that we are seeing.

Host: And there are riots …

CE: They expressed serious concern and it’s no secret. There have been so many articles and commentaries and reports, for example, in the People’s Daily and CCTV. And so we can all read about it. And they have expressed serious concern about the situation in Hong Kong. But at the same time, they have expressed full confidence in myself and in the SAR Government to tackle the situation. Now, Hong Kong has been fortunate so far, for the HKSAR government, and myself included to have such a high level of confidence and support.

Host: Okay, now, I just have a couple more questions. How do you think the world will see us now after this has happened? Is there going to be a different world view of us?
CE: Well, I hope the world will see two things. One is the patience and tolerance on the part of the Police Force which are very different from the degree of patience and tolerance that other Police Forces in other countries, including Western democratic countries, have displayed. Secondly, I think the world will see that Hong Kong is a law-abiding society, after all, and law and order will be restored as soon as possible.

Host: Okay, last question. What is the end game? How do you see the end game here?

CE: I don’t like to guess.

Host: Would it be ungovernable because nobody thinks that the political reform package will pass for 2017?

CE: I have the responsibility to manage, I have the responsibility to deliver universal suffrage in Hong Kong in 2017. So I’d like to talk to the students and I’d like to talk to the rest of Hong Kong, so that we have universal suffrage in 2017 according to the Basic Law.

Host: Do you think that’s going to happen?

CE: And I work very hard to achieve it. It will be a milestone, an important milestone in the history of Hong Kong.

Host: Will that happen? Last question, will that happen?

CE: I’m not guessing, I am working for it, I hope it will happen.

Host: Okay, thank you very much, Chief Executive. Thank you for watching Newsline. See you next time. Good evening.

Ends/Sunday, October 19, 2014