

Speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mrs Anson Chan, GBM, JP

Mr Tang, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a great pleasure to be here this morning to officiate at the Seminar on Police Complaints System. When Robert wrote to me last June to invite me to this seminar, I felt obliged to say 'yes' to him. This is not because I am eager to be the only female speaker addressing today's seminar, which happens to fall on International Women's Day. Rather, it is because I very much value the opportunity to be with you - to participate in person and to underline the sincerity and commitment of the Government in ensuring that the public have access to a fair and open system to address any complaints they may have against the Police.

Let me begin by setting the scene. Hong Kong is known to be one of the safest cities in the world. Our overall crime rate is roughly the same as that of Singapore, but lower than Tokyo, Toronto and many other metropolitan cities. This hard-earned reputation must not be taken for granted. It represents the joint achievement of all our disciplined services and, in particular, the Hong Kong Police Force. I commend members of the Force for their dedication and professionalism.

Our Police Force has some 35,000 disciplined and civilian staff, supplemented by approximately 5,000 auxiliary Police officers. The majority of the members of this big family are front-line officers who provide direct service to nearly seven million people on a daily basis. Together, they make some five million recorded contacts with members of the public every year. What an impressive figure! And what does it suggest? It suggests that there are five million opportunities for our Police officers either to leave a helpful and positive impression on the people they serve, or to leave their customers dissatisfied and wanting to lodge a complaint.

As members of the public become increasingly aware of their rights as private citizens, it has become increasingly common for Police officers to be challenged when they carry out routine duties such as identity checks and traffic control. Against this background, I think no one will dispute that an efficient, fair and credible police complaints system is essential in ensuring that

proper action is taken to address genuine grievances. Such a system also strengthens the trust and confidence of the public in our crime-fighters, and protects Police officers who discharge their duties in good faith against unfounded allegations.

I understand that currently, complaints against the Police are first investigated by the Complaints Against Police Office, or CAPO. It is a special unit in the Police Force comprising officers under a separate chain of command from the rest of the Police. CAPO undertakes investigations under the monitor and oversight of the Independent Police Complaints Council, or IPCC. IPCC may request CAPO to re-investigate a complaint, interview witnesses and send observers to monitor CAPO's investigation process. The Council may also submit its findings and recommendations to the Chief Executive when necessary.

Despite the differences in their roles, one thing is clear as crystal - CAPO and IPCC share one common goal, and that is to strive to maintain the highest standards of conduct and discipline within the Police Force. I am glad to learn that over the past few years, new features have been introduced to strengthen the credibility and transparency of the system. For example, IPCC has opened some of its meetings to the public. CAPO has installed closed circuit television and recording facilities. IPCC members may now interview witnesses and observe investigations by CAPO in person on a scheduled or surprise basis. And retired IPCC members and other community leaders are appointed as Lay Observers to observe CAPO's investigations.

Allow me to divert a bit here and share with you some interesting statistics about complaints against the Police. In the year of 2000, CAPO received nearly 6,000 complaints. Among these, 2,200 cases (or 37%) were fully investigated. Others were either withdrawn, not pursuable, or resolved between the complainants and the police officers concerned. After investigation, only 275 cases were substantiated either fully or partially, accounting for 12.5% of the investigated complaints, or 4.5% of all complaints received. Seen against the five million contacts made by the Police with the public every year, I dare say our Police Force is one we can be proud of. But this statement is credible only because all the investigation results have been reviewed and endorsed by IPCC, a body held in high regard by the wider community.

I can assure you all that CAPO and IPCC are not toiling alone. High on

the Government's agenda is a constant search for measures to further strengthen the independent role of IPCC in the police complaints system and enhance its effectiveness. We are now working on legislative proposals to make IPCC a statutory body. We will also continue to identify ways and means to improve the thoroughness, transparency, fairness and efficiency of the police complaint investigation process.

Findings in a recent public opinion survey indicate that there is an increase in community awareness of the work of IPCC. The public also see the work of the Council in a most positive light. These encouraging findings are due in no small measure to the commitment and untiring efforts of the Chairmen and Members of the IPCC, past and present, in upholding the principles of fairness and transparency in discharging their responsibilities. I congratulate you all on a job well done, and thank you on behalf of the community for your hard work, your enthusiasm and commitment to serve.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the IPCC for taking the initiative to organise this Seminar on Police Complaint System for the local community. The theme of this seminar is "Keys to an Effective Police Complaints Monitoring System". I am sure that both our local and overseas experts will have a lot to share on what these keys are and how we can prepare ourselves for the challenges in the years ahead.

I wish this seminar every success. I hope all participants will find it a stimulating and rewarding experience. For our distinguished speakers from overseas, I wish you a very pleasant and fruitful stay in Hong Kong.

Thank you.