

**Commission on Strategic Development**  
**Issues to be Considered and Discussed – April 6, 2006**  
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**Overview**

We can and should be talking about all of these issues to improve Hong Kong's positioning in the international community and contribute to the nation's varied diplomatic relationships. But we have to remember that Hong Kong's quality of life remains a basic condition for discussing its position in the international community.

"Quality of life" is a complex concept, with different meanings for different people. It encompasses the strength and quality of our institutions, based upon the rule of law, as well as an attractive natural environment and a thriving cultural life. For many people, Hong Kong's quality of life is closely linked with its openness in terms of business, finance, immigration, media, and the free flow of ideas. It is a matter of debate how much weight to give each of these, and when trade-offs need to be made for the sake of the greater public interest.

But there are certain minimum thresholds, and we have to be prepared to act upon them. We must ensure that we have clean water and clean air, the basics of environmental protection. We must offer guarantees of hygiene and public health, in a world that remembers SARS and is anxious about prospects for the next pandemic. We must take steps to guarantee improvements in air quality, which has deteriorated, by enforcing tougher emission requirements for our energy utilities, and by getting polluting vehicles off the road, through fuel switching and congestion charging. Public safety is a basic minimum. These values are well established in Hong Kong but we must not allow any erosion, and we must be prepared to be aggressive about the guarantees we offer to maintain a minimum threshold, before moving on to the next step.

From this perspective, let me address three of the questions under consideration – strategies for competitiveness; non-traditional security threats; and raising community awareness of international issues.

**Strategies for competitiveness in the political realm**

- In order to compete in the Asia-Pacific area, we need to develop a number of things in the political realm.
- Universal suffrage is just one component, and while we are working towards that goal, we also need to strengthen our institutions for policy-making and policy execution.
- Since 1997, too frequently major policies have led to stalemate, and failed through lack of public support or poor planning. We need to have better ways of making things happen.
- This points to the strengthening of existing institutions, through building expert capacity and enhancing executive powers, as well as institutionalizing public input.
- Pre-1997, advisory committees played the role of providing public input, but in the aftermath of the handover, their role has weakened and to some extent been replaced by broad public consultation.
- Public consultation is valuable and necessary, but needs to be accompanied by leadership to make decisions.
- One model of a fully functional urban institution is the Airport Authority, which has been so successful that it is considering privatization.
- In other areas, particularly planning, we are weak in execution as well as managing public inputs. It is time we look into the existing system. Other cities sometimes address this

function through the establishment of a planning authority or appointment of a master planner, subject to political guidance and authority. We have a town planning board in Hong Kong, but it needs to be improved to reflect changing times and the current political environment.

- Whatever the model we adopt, we need to focus on being able to get things done and avoid the type of problems that have been associated with the West Kowloon Cultural Hub and other major urban planning projects.
- We have all the right people, in different places, but we need to tie them together.

#### **Strategies for combating non-traditional security threats**

- One of Hong Kong's main strengths as a Chinese city is in the sphere of information. Its openness to the free exchange of information, and the credibility of that information, are essential to its role as a financial center. We can build from this strength in combating non-traditional security threats.
- In managing regional and global crises in the areas of disease, disaster, and terrorism, Hong Kong could play a role as an information clearing-house, in cooperation with other centers around the world.
- This points to the creation of a research center or think tank, possibly attached to one of our leading universities, for crisis management support. Tasks assigned to this center would help to preempt crises and support crisis management by government leaders.
- An example of such a crisis management function is mapping of avian flu outbreaks, including detailed histories of individual cases and comprehensive geographical and medical surveys of each outbreak site or source. Such information gathering would potentially cover not only Hong Kong but Southern China as well, in cooperation with authorities in the coastal provinces.

#### **Raising community awareness of Hong Kong's international role**

- Fundamentally, international awareness is dependent on educational level and actions. Hong Kong's public is already highly literate and alert to international news and events. When Hong Kong hosts an international meeting such as the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting last December, it raises the level of community awareness through action.
- Since 1997, however, there has been a degree of ambiguity about Hong Kong's status in international organizations. This ambiguity has created confusion in the public mind.
- In the next phase, Hong Kong should be prepared to emphasize and celebrate its unique advantages as a "Special Administrative Region."
- To take the WTO meeting as an example, government should work together with business and the community to build an awareness of Hong Kong's historical role in the organization; the importance of global free trade to the success of Hong Kong and the mainland; and the value of bringing such events and conferences to the city.
- Looking back at the WTO meeting, image management over-emphasized security issues and under-emphasized the importance of Hong Kong as a participant.