

THE FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION OF HONG KONG

Chairman's Address

to the 66th Annual General Meeting on Thursday, 9 December 2021

by Dr Cheung Kai Bun, Chairperson

Mr Chu, Professor Ngan, Members and Staff of the Association, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now have the pleasure of making a few remarks on behalf of the Council and the Association. We are very privileged to have Mr Ricky Chu, Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission, as our Guest of Honour this year. The EOC works towards creating a pluralistic and inclusive society free of discrimination, where there is no barrier to equal opportunities. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the EOC for sponsoring us for organizing a video contest for educating the ethnic minorities on sexual harassment prevention this year. The winning works were uploaded onto the social media platforms, attracting thousands of views in a short period of time. The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong envisions all people are free to make choices about their sexuality and well-being, in a world without discrimination. As important as the provision of quality services is our advocacy and promotion work on sexual and reproductive health and rights. All human rights protection and promotion are underlain on a framework of non-discrimination, including the sexual and reproductive rights. We share a common dream with the EOC of a world of equal opportunities for all people, and look forward to hearing from Mr Chu his insights in a moment.

It appeared as the heading of a commentary on fertility issues in a local paper earlier this year – “Baby, it’s not a good time”. The alarm has been sounded over the decline of Hong Kong’s population, with deaths outnumbering births last year and for the first time since the 1960s. Covid-19 was one of the major factors for the dramatic drop in the fertility rate for the past two years. Weddings were put off, leading to the lowest annual number of marriages over the past 10 years. Pregnancy plans were held back, out of fears for the higher risks of serious complications after infection as well as the prevailing social and financial instability. Hong Kong’s Total Fertility Rate hit a historic low at 0.87 last year, and the downward trend may continue. There is also a trend in the postponement of marriage, with a rise in the median age of women getting married and the median age at first childbirth.

We have been monitoring the pattern of family planning through the Survey on Family Planning Knowledge, Attitude and Practice in Hong Kong, which is conducted every 5 years since 1967. In the 2017 Survey, couples were asked about their reasons for not

having children or having only one child. The most commonly cited reasons were “heavy financial burden”, “heavy parental responsibilities”, “wanting more time and space for personal development” and “lack of living space”. Another survey we conducted in 2016 indicated that our young generation was increasingly ambivalent about marriage and family formation. Besides the departure from traditional values towards marriage and family, a sense of socio-economic insecurity may be perceived in this highly competitive society. Covid-19 now adds fuel to the population pressure and the fertility where the trend to keep falling has already been very obvious. There have been many discussions on how to encourage childbirth or boost the fertility rate in Hong Kong. The extension of statutory maternity leave last year considered to be conducive to childbearing showed no positive effect amid the pandemic. The pandemic has lasted for two years, and yet there is still no end in sight. Childbearing as well as the timing of childbearing remain an individual choice we make according to our circumstances and experiences. A woman’s chances of getting pregnant will however decrease with age, and those couples who choose to delay to start families or have babies because of the pandemic should be made aware of this. As the social distancing restrictions are further relaxed and the Covid-19 vaccination rates rise, the community is hoping to return to a semblance of normal pre-pandemic life, removing this barrier to childbearing.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused much disruption to our frontline services last year as the clinic hours were shortened from time to time and the school programmes moved to online. We look at 2021 and thankfully it has been easier especially in the second half of the year. Operating hours are resumed normal and our staff can now conduct face-to-face programmes in schools though still with masks on at all times. We experienced a significant year-on-year drop in the overall client attendance by 10% last year, which, I am glad to say, is expected to rebound to the 2019 level this year. On the other hand, we have just undergone a comprehensive review for accreditation by the International Planned Parenthood Federation last month, attaining over 95% compliance. This review covered essentially all aspects of the Association’s functions and activities, ranging from board governance to financial sustainability and frontline service delivery, over the last couple of years. Rome was not built in a day. It is the collective efforts of our volunteers and staff who have laid bricks and worked on it every single day. Thank you all for making all these possible.

Finally, I must thank the Government for its continued support, and our donors for their generous contributions. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to all the volunteers and staff for their dedication and diligence. And thank you all again for coming today and for your unfailing support of The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong.