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**Speech by the Hon Mrs Selina Chow Liang Shuk-ye, GBS,
JP**
**Motion Debate on Accountability System for Principal
Officials, 10 July 2003**



Selina Chow:

The Liberal Party was one of the first advocates of the accountability system. We have remained a staunch supporter, and have helped to bring about the implementation of the system last year.

The system has operated for less than a year, and it is fair to say that the principal officials have been trying their best to be responsive to the community. However, like any cabinet, there are bound to be some members who perform very well, and others who do not.

One of the merits of an accountability system is the flexibility it offers to the Chief Executive to change members expeditiously without being hampered by the red tape of the bureaucracy. As the appointments of principal officials are political appointments, their main duty is to not only to make policies that best serve the public interest, but also to take charge of the political management of such policies to ensure their acceptability and adoption by the community.

There is no doubt that our people have high aspirations regarding the accountability system, as well as the principal officials that that system has placed in the key positions of leadership in the governing team. The fact that many of them have never taken up any public office before their appointments, and are therefore unfamiliar with the procedures and workings of the political process, has at times made life difficult for themselves as well as for this Council, and the community. During last year, it is clear that those principal officials who have had experience of the workings of the Government have on the whole done better than those who have not. It is a fact that, broadly speaking, principal officials are more prepared to face the public, the media, and this Council than their predecessors in the Civil Service.

The Liberal Party maintains that the system is the right one for our Government. It is for this reason that we cannot possibly vote for the motion.

We believe that whatever problems we might have had with the workings of the system, we should appeal to the Chief Executive to come up with solutions, as it is his prerogative and in his interest that the system works well. Cabinet reshuffle is a means with which he can use to fine-tune the effectiveness of his team, so we do not object to the use

of this tool if the Chief Executive believes that the situation warrants it. However, we are sure that if this happens, it would be regarded as a very serious move, and the result of the reshuffle must have the acceptance of the community. This is no easy task, as such changes would need to be confidential before the final decisions are announced. It therefore requires the best political judgement and the most accurate assessment of community acceptance.

Madam President, the Liberal Party cannot believe that anyone who love Hong Kong could be unmoved by the march on the 1 July and the sit-in last night, least of all Mr TUNG. He has also assured us that he always listens to the voice of the people. The word "accountability" implies a two-way relationship between the Government and the people. Mr TUNG has to admit that no matter how hard he and his team have tried, there are many in the community who do not believe the system has worked well. He must therefore acknowledge and accept the cry for changes he must make to his team so as to prove that the system can work effectively and in line with the will of the people.

Yesterday, in a press interview of a five year old, she said that Mr TUNG does not admit he is wrong. Perhaps the starting point of the reshuffle is the acknowledgment that he has stuck up once, twice, or thrice even too often for mistakes that his team members have made.

The system has not failed. We hope steps Mr TUNG will take, sooner rather than later, will prove it so.