

[SJ to lead delegation to visit Middle East](#)

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, will lead an about 30-strong delegation, comprising representatives from the Law Society of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Bar Association, the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited, Invest Hong Kong and related sectors, this afternoon (May 18) on a five-day visit to Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and Abu Dhabi and Dubai in United Arab Emirates, to promote Hong Kong's legal and dispute resolution services and enhance co-operation and exchanges between Hong Kong and the Middle East.

During their visit, Mr Lam and the delegation will meet with local legal and business sectors to have a better understanding of their need for cross-jurisdictional legal services. They will also call on relevant government officials to discuss and exchange views on various areas of legal co-operation.

Mr Lam will speak to the local legal and business sectors during the visit, in Riyadh at a networking luncheon, and in Dubai at a half-day forum and a networking luncheon.

The visit to the Middle East is conducted with the support of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Dubai and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council.

Mr Lam will conclude his visit and depart for Hong Kong on May 23. During Mr Lam's absence, the Deputy Secretary for Justice, Mr Cheung Kwok-kwan, will be the Acting Secretary for Justice.

[SCED: Hong Kong remains steadfast in supporting rules-based multilateral trading system \(with photos\)](#)

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, spoke at a discussion session entitled "Trade Liberalisation: World Trade Organization (WTO)" at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) Meeting in Arequipa, Peru on May 17 (Arequipa time).
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At the discussion session, Mr Yau shared his insights with the participating trade ministers on how to reinforce the WTO's credibility and ensure its continued relevance in the evolving global trade landscape.

Mr Yau stressed that a pressing priority is to restore by 2024 a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all WTO members. He called on APEC member economies to expedite discussions in an inclusive and transparent manner so as to achieve concrete outcomes as they agreed in the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi.

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Meanwhile, Mr Yau said that the WTO must demonstrate its capability to formulate rules addressing the complex challenges of today's global trading scene, citing the Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce and the successful conclusion of the negotiations for the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement.

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He added that the extension of the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions at MC13 preserved the facilitating environment for all businesses, in particular for micro, small and medium enterprises and women-led enterprises, to continue pursuing cross-border trade and deepening their presence in the global market which is now deeply ingrained in E-commerce.

In the morning, Mr Yau and trade ministers of other APEC member economies also attended a joint meeting with Ministers Responsible for Women to discuss women's economic empowerment through trade.

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Mr Yau said that lowering the cost of doing business or streamlining procedures through the use of technology, and wider digitalisation of trade can help women to start and develop their businesses. Noting that Hong Kong has been implementing various measures on this front, he called on APEC member economies to help accelerate this transformation through collaborative efforts so as to open up new opportunities for women to participate in trade.

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On the margins of the meeting, Mr Yau took the opportunity to meet with the Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, Mr Taku Ishii, and the Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations of Singapore, Ms Grace Fu, to exchange views on issues of mutual concern.

Mr Yau will continue to join the MRT Meeting on May 18 (Arequipa time).



[Speech by SCED at APEC MRT Meeting discussion session on Trade Liberalisation: World Trade Organization \(English only\)](#)

â€‹Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, at the discussion session entitled "Trade Liberalisation: World Trade Organization (WTO)" at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting in Arequipa, Peru, today (May 17, Arequipa time):

Good afternoon, Chair, Deputy Director-General of the WTO (Ms Angela Paolini Ellard), and colleagues.

I would like to thank Peru for bringing us to this beautiful and historic city of Arequipa and for their warm hospitality.

Despite various challenges, the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) managed to deliver some, albeit modest, outcomes. At this critical juncture, APEC's role as a champion of the WTO assumes even greater significance. APEC not only provides a platform for open dialogue about the WTO, fostering trust and understanding among member economies, but also serves as an incubator for innovative ideas and solutions. Allow me to make a few recommendations on how we can make the most out of the MC13 outcomes to reinforce the WTO's credibility and ensure its continued relevance in the evolving global trade landscape.

First, a pressing priority is to restore by 2024 a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all WTO members, a goal we set to achieve in less than eight months' time. With the appointment of a new facilitator and the formalisation of the reform process, it is important for the membership to expedite discussions in an inclusive and transparent manner so as to achieve concrete outcomes by the end of 2024 as we agreed in Abu Dhabi. Hong Kong, China (HKC) fully supports the interest-based, "bottom-up" and solution-oriented approach in the upcoming discussions, and we call upon APEC member economies to step up our engagement, be responsive to the views of WTO members, and more importantly be constructive and creative in finding a landing zone in the remaining discussions.

Second, the WTO must demonstrate its capability to formulate rules addressing the complex challenges of today's global trading scene. At a time when achieving multilateral consensus is becoming more and more challenging, plurilateral trade initiatives emerge as a pragmatic solution for addressing pressing issues of common concern. We welcome the successful conclusion of the negotiations for the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement, supported by a significant majority of WTO members, including a substantial number from the APEC region. Closely on its heels is the Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce where again many of us at APEC are participants. Together we must push forward with the early incorporation of such plurilateral initiatives into the WTO's legal framework and encourage more WTO members to join the agreements.

On trade and environment, we are so close, yet still a distance away from both the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the conclusion of the second-wave negotiations. Most of us here have formally accepted the Agreement, and we urge others to expedite actions to reinforce APEC's leadership in promoting positive trade and environment outcomes. HKC will continue to work constructively with WTO members to bridge the remaining gaps in discussions in Geneva.

The extension of the moratorium on customs duty on electronic transmissions at the eleventh hour of the MC13 preserved the facilitating environment for all businesses, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and women in particular, to continue pursuing cross-border trade and deepening their presence in the global market which is now deeply ingrained in e-

commerce. Going forward, the extension of the moratorium deserves the support of APEC member economies as we continue to engage in useful dialogues to refine the relevant framework and trading environment.

An APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) delegation recently made a visit to Geneva to foster dialogues and explore opportunities for a deeper engagement with the WTO community. As a group, APEC should support ABAC's initiatives in this regard to ensure ideas and views from our business community are given due consideration in WTO discussions.

HKC remains steadfast in supporting the rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core. Recognising that every step of the progress contributes to the larger tapestry of global economic co-operation, we are committed to working together with WTO members to invest in the negotiations and bolster institutional functions of the WTO.

Thank you.

Speech by SCED at APEC Joint Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Trade and Ministers Responsible for Women (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Joint Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Trade and Ministers Responsible for Women in Arequipa, Peru, today (May 17, Arequipa time):

Thank you, Co-Chairs.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to Peru for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation in this enchanting "White City" of Arequipa. Today's meeting is particularly special, as we are joined by our fellow Ministers Responsible for Women in this first joint ministerial meeting on women and trade in APEC's history.

Undoubtedly, trade and women's economic empowerment are profoundly intertwined. Representing nearly 55 per cent of our population in Hong Kong, China (HKC), women play a crucial role in driving economic growth. While HKC's trade policy is gender-neutral, we are keenly aware of the possible constraints faced by women in trade, from the dual burdens of job and family commitments to specific challenges they face, which may include lack of mobility, skills, funding and networks.

To enhance women's participation in trade and capitalise on the rising trends in global trade, we consider it essential to eliminate barriers to trade, such as lowering the cost of doing business or streamlining procedures through the use of technology. In tandem, wider digitalisation of trade can help women, many of whom lead smaller-scale or home-based businesses, to develop and grow their operations. Indeed, building digital skills, encouraging women's participation in the digital economy and innovation, as well as strengthening the capacity of women-owned and women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to participate in the global value chain, are all key action areas set out in the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth endorsed in 2019.

In HKC, we are implementing various measures on this front. For example, we are pushing towards with the final phase of our Trade Single Window, and have put in place the Digital Transformation Support Pilot Programme to assist MSMEs in electronic payment and other digital solution packages. Within APEC, we hope that through collaborative efforts, we could help accelerate this transformation to open up new opportunities for women to participate in trade, including through continued implementation of the APEC Internet and Digital Economy Roadmap.

Support measures for MSMEs can help women reap the benefits of trade. For HKC, we provide extensive support for MSMEs through over 40 funding schemes and support programmes, such as the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme which specifically aims to enhance access to bank financing. HKC also promotes the use of online dispute resolution in APEC to facilitate MSMEs' uptake of digital technologies to resolve disputes at a lower cost and with ease, thereby enabling their inclusive participation in international trade.

The path to women's empowerment in trade extends beyond creating equal opportunities; it is about unlocking the vast potential that a diverse economy offers. We hope that APEC member economies can continue our efforts in liberalising and facilitating trade, and building a trade and investment environment that is free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, inclusive and predictable, as our Leaders committed in the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040.

Allow me to pause here and invite my senior official to introduce HKC's other efforts and policies to facilitate women's access to the economy.

Thank you.

[Territory-wide flag day today](#)

Heung Hoi Ching Kok Lin Association has been issued a Public

Subscription Permit to hold a territory-wide flag sale from 7am to 12.30pm today (May 18), a spokesman for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said.

Details of the charitable fund-raising activities, including any updated information, covered by the issued Public Subscription Permits have been published on the GovHK website (www.gov.hk/en/theme/fundraising/search). Permits for flag days containing information on contact methods of the flag-selling organisations and the approved flag-selling activities have also been uploaded to the SWD's website (www.swd.gov.hk/en/ngo/controlofc/flagdays) for reference. For enquiries, please call the SWD's hotline at 2343 2255, or the designated hotline of the 1823 Call Centre at 3142 2678.

In the case of suspected fraudulent flag day activities, people should not make any donation and should immediately report the matter to the Police, the spokesman added.