

COVID-19 Online Dispute Resolution Scheme launched today (with photos)

In anticipation of an upsurge of disputes arising from or relating to COVID-19, the Government announced on April 8 the establishment of the COVID-19 Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund to provide speedy and cost effective ODR services to the general public and businesses, in particular micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. The Scheme is launched today (June 29). The eBRAM International Online Dispute Resolution Centre (eBRAM Centre) has been engaged to provide ODR and related services under the Scheme and will operate the Scheme independently.

The Scheme will cover:

- (1) disputes arising out of or in relation to COVID-19 directly or indirectly;
- (2) cases where the claim amount is not more than \$500,000; and
- (3) cases where either one of the parties to the dispute is a Hong Kong resident or company.

The parties are required to enter into a dispute resolution agreement under the Scheme and pay \$200 each as registration fees. The fees for mediators and arbitrators will be paid by the Government.

Under the Scheme, parties will attempt to resolve their disputes through a multi-tiered dispute resolution mechanism comprising negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Each tier will be conducted within a limited time. The Scheme aims to offer a speedy and cost effective means to resolve disputes among parties, avoiding disputes and differences from being entrenched, thereby helping to build and reinforce a harmonious society. It may help relieve the court's caseload in civil claims and have the benefit of job creation and job advancement for the legal and dispute resolution sector. Moreover, the Scheme will utilise an ODR platform thereby strengthening Hong Kong's lawtech capability.

With the soft launch of the platform under the Scheme, eBRAM Centre has commenced a series of publicity work to introduce the Scheme to stakeholders and the public. For instance, eBRAM Centre delivered a presentation at the Department of Justice this morning demonstrating the operation of the ODR platform and process. For more details on the Scheme, please visit the website (www.ebram.org/covid_19_odr.html).

