

Eulogy by CE at funeral service of Sir David Akers-Jones (English only)

Following is the eulogy by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the funeral service of Sir David Akers-Jones today (October 25):

Family and friends of Sir David,

Today, we gather here together to pay our final respect to a selfless leader, a great public servant and an inspiring mentor who will always be in the hearts of many of us. While we mourn the loss of such a distinguished, universally respected man, let us all take this opportunity to celebrate his numerous visionary and heart-warming achievements which no one could easily match. For those of us who had the good fortune of knowing him or working with him, the greetings of Sir David, David or “~~David~~” embraced a strong sense of bonding, friendship and trust which everybody was so fond of. This was no exception to those who had known him for over half a century or had had only a few encounters with him during his long, illustrious and delightful journey in Hong Kong.

Indeed, after coming to Hong Kong in the 1950s, Sir David had all along called Hong Kong his home. Before Hong Kong's return to the motherland, he served in various posts in the Government, the highest-ranking of which was the Chief Secretary. After retirement, he took up work on local youth and charities in the Mainland. Committed to serving the community all his life with distinguished achievements, Sir David was held in high regard by people of various sectors and from different backgrounds. He was awarded the Grand Bauhinia Medal by the Hong Kong SAR Government in 2002.

Serving the Government for 30 years before Hong Kong's return to the motherland, Sir David was the Chief Secretary from 1985 to 1987 and had been the acting Governor for a few months. He took charge of work in the New Territories in earlier years, during which he served as District Officer in a few districts there as well as the Secretary for the New Territories. Yuen Long was perhaps one of the NT districts that he was proud and fond of where he had mobilised community resources to build some much needed community and sports facilities. As a junior AO working in one of the NT District Offices in the early 1980s, I was invited to receptions hosted by Sir David at Island House. Such contacts with a super senior official were to me both educational and entertaining.

Committed to advancing various developments to improve the lives of residents, Sir David took up a vital role in the development of new towns in the New Territories. Meanwhile, he attached great importance to the provision of accommodation to members of the public and took an active role in implementing a wide range of housing policies across different positions. Many of us would have heard the story he told us about a morning meeting with the then Governor to assess the housing shortfall where ambitious plans for

public housing were laid out, and embarked upon without hesitation. His remarkable leadership and dedication during his public service laid an important foundation for the long-term development of Hong Kong.

Sir David continued to serve Hong Kong fervently after he left the civil service in 1987. He was the first non-official Chairman of the Hong Kong Housing Authority, and a Hong Kong Affairs Adviser, contributing to the smooth transition of Hong Kong. He established the Business and Professionals Federation of Hong Kong, a pioneering think tank, in 1990 and had offered valuable views for the Policy Addresses and on major social issues to the Government over the years. I often consulted him while I served in different posts, from poverty alleviation measures to retirement protection programmes. He seemed to have boundless energy to steer in-depth discussions and drive people around him to engage in creative thinking. I have to say that arguing with him was no easy task. I remember one occasion when I had to be armed with charts and diagrams to show him the scope of our social security programmes.

We all know that Sir David was particularly concerned about young people. To him, caring for young people meant listening to them and interacting with them. And Sir David was always surrounded by his young friends throughout the years. On a more formal basis, in addition to long-time association with the Hong Kong Girl Guides together with his late beloved wife Jane, Sir David founded the 10,000 Miles Friendship Trek, an exchange programme, which has been held for 17 years to this year, to provide exchange opportunities in the Mainland for our local uniformed groups, sparing no effort in nurturing the younger generations. He attended the last flag presentation ceremony on 15 July this year at Government House despite his deteriorating health.

Sir David's care for the community did not stop in Hong Kong. He was also committed to charitable activities in the Mainland. The project "Wu Zhi Qiao" (Bridge to China) founded by him encourages university student volunteers from Hong Kong and the Mainland to design and build footbridges and village facilities in remote and poor villages in the Mainland in order to enhance the understanding of students about the Mainland and assist them in developing integrity and a commitment to society and life. I joined him on two of those trips and could only admire how an eighty-year old man could be so energetic and enthusiastic when surrounded by children who benefited from the programme. As he shared with us in one publication on this charity, "there is much more to building a bridge ... there is always a lasting of surprise and delight at having removed a barrier separating places or people from one another".

Another of his significant charitable endeavours is the Beam International Foundation which in the past 28 years has been devoted to organising medical volunteers from various places around the world to provide free surgeries for underprivileged children with cleft lips and cleft palates in the Mainland. Having had the privilege to take part in the charitable activities he organised on many occasions, I hold deep respect for his devotion and passion to improve the well-being of people.

To appreciate how approachable, caring and ready to give Sir David was, I feel the best way is to listen to what one of his mentees has to say. And allow me to quote from her inputs to this eulogy.

"As part of the university's mentorship programme, it was his weekly commitment to set aside an hour or two to grill me with challenging questions that could be about anything under the sun – ranging from local politics to Greek mythology to the meaning of life. I would be sitting on pins and needles throughout my sessions. But as the saying goes: 'Good medicine is bitter to the taste'. I immensely benefited from these dialogues with him – it broadened my perspectives on the world, trained my critical thinking, polished my political acumen and reminded me that public policy makers must always put people first.

"I continued to receive his guidance on difficult choices in careers and in personal life, and Sir David was an unfailing source of wisdom. He never told me what to do, but offered thought-provoking perspectives.

"Mentorship aside, I will remember him for his generosity, for he shared more than insight and connections with me and my fellow mentees. For one, I know he was a philanthropist, standing quietly but staunchly behind several of our homegrown scholars to further their studies abroad. It was his firm belief that the vision and potential of young people must never be hampered by a lack of means.

"Sir David will be deeply missed as a great mentor to many, and as an eminent figure that shaped Hong Kong – not just in history, but also by building the younger generation of Hong Kong with painstaking love and care. This makes for an enduring legacy in this city that we all call home."
Unquote.

Although I had only a short stint of service overlapping with his, Sir David had all along been a senior whom, to me, was likewise approachable, caring and ready to give. During my days as the Chief Secretary, we had quiet dinners at Victoria House and he told me that the fish pond was actually dug by him. During his last few weeks, I visited him at his sick bed and was immensely moved by the support and sincere views given to me. On those occasions, I knew very well that he was saddened by what was happening in Hong Kong. He held my hand and raised his voice to say: help the poor and build more housing. And I promised him I would.

Sir David's spirit in serving the community and his contributions to the Hong Kong society will stay in our hearts forever. And our deepest condolences go to Bryony, Craig, Amelia-Jane, Susanne and all other family members.

Sir David, David, 𐄂𐄃𐄄𐄅", you will be sorely missed, always. May you rest in peace with abundant love of the Lord.