

SCED reaffirms Hong Kong's support for free trade and multilateral trading system on US visit (with photos)

Hong Kong vigorously pursues a free trade policy and firmly believes in multilateral trading system, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, said at a luncheon today (June 12, Eastern Standard Time) during his duty visit to Washington, DC, the United States (US), citing that Hong Kong, despite its small size, has been the seventh largest merchandise trading entity in the world.

The luncheon was co-organised by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Washington, DC and the Brookings Institution. Mr Yau shared his insights on the state of free trade from Hong Kong's perspective with about 60 US business and academic leaders.

Noting the emergence of trade tensions and protectionist sentiments around the world, Mr Yau said, "This is indeed a testing time, as the free trade philosophy that many economies subscribe to comes into doubt. We have been actively engaging our trading partners at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and elsewhere to convey our concerns."

"As a free trade practitioner and staunch supporter of the multilateral trading system, we believe that disputes are best dealt with through negotiations and the WTO rather than unilaterally," Mr Yau said, adding that the success of this system is supported by evidence, as world trade volumes in 2017 were roughly 40 times the level recorded in the early days of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

He said that Hong Kong has taken a multi-pronged approach to diversify its economy and broaden its consumer market catchment, in large part by reinforcing partnerships. Hong Kong and like-minded economies are pressing ahead to forge alliances through the signing of free trade agreements (FTAs). In this regard, the latest addition to Hong Kong's FTA portfolio is a high quality and comprehensive in scope FTA, and an investment agreement with Australia signed in March.

In addition to joining the luncheon, Mr Yau called on the Deputy Chief of Mission and Minister of the Chinese Embassy in the US, Mr Li Kexin.

Mr Yau will depart the US for Hong Kong tomorrow (June 13, Eastern Standard Time). The Under Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, will, in the place of Mr Yau, lead the business and professional mission to visit Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on June 16 and 17.

