

Speech by CE at HCCH Asia Pacific Week 2023 (English only) (with photos/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at the HCCH Asia Pacific Week 2023 today (September 11):

Assistant Minister Hua Chunying (Member of the CPC Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs), Acting Commissioner Pan Yundong (Acting Commissioner of Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), Dr Christophe Bernasconi (Secretary General of the Hague Conference on Private International Law), Chief Justice Andrew Cheung (Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal), President Andrew Leung (President of the Legislative Council), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon to you all. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you – distinguished speakers and guests from around the world – to Hong Kong.

And I'm pleased to see that Dr Bernasconi is back in Hong Kong again. The Secretary General was here last November for our annual Legal Week.

I'm also pleased to welcome Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Hua Chunying, who is here with us today. I'm grateful for the strong support that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affords to Hong Kong in our co-operation and exchanges with the world.

Today, we are gathered for this year's Asia Pacific Week of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, or HCCH. This three-day gathering of legal and judicial leaders, academics, government officials and other professionals – all deeply involved in law and its manifold areas, interests and promotion – marks the 130th anniversary of the HCCH.

And where better than opening this Week at the Cheng Yu Tung Tower, which houses the Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong (HKU)?

HKU has just celebrated its 111th anniversary and its Faculty of Law is the first and oldest law school in Hong Kong. HKU Law was always in the top rating. HKU Law was ranked Asia's second last year. A remarkable heritage, hosting this significant event of an organisation with an eminent history.

This Asia Pacific Week is also the first in-person law conference of this magnitude since Hong Kong's resumption to normalcy, earlier this year, following the pandemic.

Yes, I am pleased to say that Hong Kong is back in business, back to the

global stage. And that of course includes international law and "the progressive unification of the rules of private international law" – the essential mandate of the HCCH.

The theme of this year's Asia Pacific Week puts a considered spotlight on access to justice, sustainability and inter-connectedness. And I can tell you that each of these objectives is highly valued by Hong Kong.

Thanks to the unique principle of "one country, two systems", Hong Kong maintains a robust and internationally recognised legal system, a rock-solid foundation for the rule of law.

Integrity and professional competence remain the hallmarks of our Judiciary, which exercises its judicial power independently in accordance with the Basic Law.

All these enable Hong Kong to thrive as an international hub for finance, trade, shipping and legal services and, no less important, as the gateway bridging our country with the rest of the world.

In our pursuit of growth and sustainable development, we benefit from national strategies closely connected to the global community.

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched personally by President Xi Jinping, entered its 10th anniversary this year. The Initiative is one of the world's largest big-picture strategies for international co-operation. Hong Kong, thanks to our international financial and professional services prowess – legal services included – is very much involved in assisting Belt and Road projects and their partners.

The fast-emerging Greater Bay Area (GBA), a cluster-city development integrating the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao, plus nine other cities in southern China, is another inspired national initiative.

The GBA has a population of over 86 million, and registered a combined GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of over US\$1.9 trillion last year, which is equivalent to the 10th largest economy in the world. Once again, Hong Kong professionals, in law, finance and a multitude of other services, are making a palpable difference.

Our strengths as an international legal hub are particularly vital to the progress of the GBA as a global innovation and technology force.

We are, of course, blessed with legal talent and experience in matters of international law and dispute resolution. The National 14th Five-Year Plan backs Hong Kong's development as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region. It helps, too, that numerous international legal and dispute resolution bodies have established a presence in Hong Kong.

They include the Asian African Legal Consultative Organization's Hong

Kong Regional Arbitration Centre, which opened here last year, and the International Organization for Mediation Preparatory Office, which followed earlier this year.

And, of course, the HCCH's Hong Kong Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific turns 11 in December.

Indeed, Hong Kong has the only HCCH regional office in the Asia Pacific. And we are pleased and proud to promote HCCH conventions and raise its visibility throughout the region.

At last year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting, in Bangkok, I assured our trading partners of Hong Kong's commitment to regional economic co-operation.

This July, I led a delegation to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, building on our friendship with the region and its leaders.

The three countries reaffirmed their support for Hong Kong's accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, the world's largest free trade agreement.

I also met with ASEAN's (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Secretary-General when I was in Jakarta. ASEAN has long been Hong Kong's second-largest trading partner. And, let me add, the longstanding co-operation between Hong Kong and ASEAN has expanded substantially, thanks to a Free Trade Agreement, in effect since 2019.

Our dedication to advancing regional economic integration is well recognised by the country. Premier Li Qiang, speaking at the ASEAN Plus Three Summit last week, remarked that the Hong Kong SAR is widely regarded as one of the world's most open economies, and appealed to the support of RCEP members in supporting our bid to become one of the first economies to join the agreement.

We are thankful for the support of the Premier and the Central Authorities to our ongoing efforts in fostering regional economic co-operation.

Ladies and gentlemen, Hong Kong remains committed in promoting the great relevance and value of the legal instruments developed by the HCCH, in enabling trade and economic activities throughout the region.

I am confident that Hong Kong and the HCCH will continue to play a meaningful role in enhancing access to justice, to sustainable growth and to inter-connectedness in the Asia-Pacific region and well beyond.

My congratulations, once again, to the Hague Conference on Private International Law on your landmark 130th anniversary. And my thanks to your Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for organising HCCH Asia Pacific Week in Hong Kong.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all the best of business, and the "business of law", at this HCCH Asia Pacific Week. Have a memorable stay in Hong Kong.

Thank you very much.

