

Speech by CE at Hong Kong International Cultural Summit (English only) (with photos/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at the Hong Kong International Cultural Summit today (March 25):

Dr Wang Xudong (Director of the Palace Museum), Your Excellency Ambassador Bertrand Lortholary (Ambassador of France to China), Deputy Director Lu Xinning (Deputy Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)), Deputy Commissioner Pan Yundong (Deputy Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong SAR), Mr Henry Tang (Chairman of the Board of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It gives me great pleasure to join you today for the opening of the Hong Kong International Cultural Summit.

More than 700 of you are here for this inaugural International Cultural Summit. And international it certainly is – with high-profile attendees from the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Europe, the Americas and beyond, and prominent speakers from at least a dozen countries and regions. The result is one of the largest international cultural gatherings ever staged in Hong Kong.

This event, and your welcome presence here, reflects Hong Kong's long-standing role as the multicultural bridge between East and West. That reality is rooted in our Chinese culture, in concert with our open, inclusive and international community – and economy. All that is premised under the auspices of the unique "one country, two systems" principle. Hong Kong is the only city in the world that enjoys both the China advantage and the global advantage.

That is why we are committed to capitalising on our unparalleled advantages, and develop Hong Kong into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange. A commitment that enjoys the full support of our country, under the National 14th Five-year Plan.

The Hong Kong SAR Government attaches great importance to propelling Hong Kong's rise as a cultural hub. And we're serious about this.

This financial year, we will inject US\$180 million into our Film Development Fund and US\$370 million into our CreateSmart Initiative, supporting projects in film, arts, design and other cultural initiatives.

We will introduce a Signature Performing Arts Programme Scheme to encourage world-class performing arts productions and international cultural brands to be staged as long-running shows in Hong Kong.

We've boosted our cultural exchange provision as well. We are determined to support more local arts groups and artists in performing outside Hong Kong.

The West Kowloon Cultural District, the vast piece of harbourside land we are now standing on, is essential to realising Hong Kong as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange – to our rise as an arts and cultural hub connecting the world.

And I'm delighted that the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority has brought you here for this global cultural gathering. I'm heartened to learn that more than 20 MOUs (Memoranda of Understanding) and cultural co-operation agreements have been signed during the Summit. And with many of the world's most renowned arts and cultural institutions.

I am confident that these and other collaborations will enrich Hong Kong's cultural landscape, and they will create invaluable opportunities for our performing arts groups, artists and young people to broaden their creative horizons. I welcome your arts and cultural groups and artists to perform in Hong Kong. And, in doing so, to experience all that Hong Kong has to offer.

In the meantime, I know you will enjoy every moment of your stay here. After all, this is Hong Kong's "Art March" – a whole month dedicated fully to mega arts and culture events and happenings. All over this world city. All over Hong Kong.

"Art@Harbour" has just opened. Put together by the Government in collaboration with teamLab and other partners, this innovative fusing of art, science and technology will light up both sides of our storied Victoria Harbour, day and night.

Art Basel Hong Kong and Art Central open this Thursday. This year's Art Basel, with its East-meets-West convergence, counts more than 240 art galleries from all over the world. That's up 37 per cent over last year, almost 40 per cent. It speaks, resoundingly, of Hong Kong's return to business – and the brilliant business of art.

For the film lovers among you, the 48th Hong Kong International Film Festival starts screening this Thursday as well.

The second edition of our Pop Culture Festival returns next month and, in June, the inaugural Chinese Culture Festival debuts.

The Hong Kong Performing Arts Expo is another first. It takes place here in October, as does the fourth edition of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Culture and Arts Festival.

The Greater Bay Area is a cluster-city development that brings together Hong Kong, Macao and nine cities in southern China. Collectively, the area boasts a population of 86 million, and is an economic powerhouse equivalent to the world's 10th largest economy. More importantly, we share similar heritage roots but also celebrate widely diverse lifestyles and custom. It is certainly a cultural extravaganza worth looking forward to.

This year, too, we will launch the first Hong Kong Fashion Design Week. It will bring together a wide variety of design events into one flagship initiative for Hong Kong's cultural, creative and tourism industries.

And we're just getting going, ladies and gentlemen. Hong Kong is on its way to becoming the arts, culture and events capital of Asia.

We are already among the largest art trading centres in the world. In the first quarter of 2023, Hong Kong realised a cheering almost 60 per cent, year-on-year growth reportedly, in artwork and antiquities exports.

That's thanks, in part, to Hong Kong's unique advantages as a free economy with a low and simple tax regime and a seamless logistics network.

Speaking of seamless logistics – and a great deal more – my thanks to the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority for organising this remarkable international gathering.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know you will enjoy your stay with us in Hong Kong. And I look forward to continuing the goodwill and the creative collaborations this Summit has set in motion. I wish you all the best of art, culture and business in the year to come. And as Henry said, spend more in Hong Kong!

Thank you.

