

Speech by CE at Hong Kong International Tourism Convention (English Only) (with photo/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Hong Kong International Tourism Convention today (December 12):

Director Wang Zhimin (Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)), Mr Yu Qun (Member of the leadership, Ministry of Culture and Tourism), Commissioner Xie Feng (Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR), Vice Governor Xu Ruisheng (Vice Governor of Guangdong Province), Secretary Tam (Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Macao Special Administrative Region Government, Mr Alexis Tam), Mr Zhu Shanzhong (Executive Director of World Tourism Organization), ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. I'm pleased to be here today for the opening of the Hong Kong International Tourism Convention, delighted to be among so many distinguished government officials and business leaders. Among the thousand or so guests here today, I'm pleased to note the participation of senior players from the nine neighbouring Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Macao Special Administrative Region, as well as a number of other Mainland provinces and a total of 34 countries.

In a time of increasing unilateralism and protectionism, tourism is a welcome tonic – a buoyant multilateral embrace of shared experience, cultural co-operation and people-to-people bonds. Indeed, connectivity, inclusiveness, the promise of mutual benefits and many other ambitions are the reasons why President Xi Jinping launched the Belt and Road Initiative some five years ago.

We know that developing people-to-people bonds is one of the five connectivities pertaining to the Belt and Road Initiative, and we believe that tourism exchange is a powerful means of promoting such bonds. Tourism exchange can foster people's understanding and appreciation of each other's culture and living. This provides the foundation for closer and stronger relationships and co-operation in the longer term.

Multilateral co-operation is no less central to the Belt and Road Initiative and to tourism development. Easing visa regulations, expanding flight connections, enhancing cultural co-operation – these and other considered measures can only help boost tourism and the rewards they offer us all. In developing regional tourism, for example, multi-destination visits can be effective. Consider, for example, the Asia Cruise Cooperation, a strategic alliance among Hong Kong, Hainan, Taiwan, Xiamen, the Philippines and Korea, in which alliance members jointly promote cruise tourism for

mutual benefits.

The Belt and Road Initiative is about capacity building and sharing benefits. Hong Kong is an international hub for professional services, from financial and legal, to architectural, communications, transportation management and many more. We also run one of the largest hospitality and tourism schools in Asia. We have the expertise, the experience and the institutions to provide services to other economies along the Belt and Road on tourism infrastructure developments, as well as train professionals for the tourism industry. And we look forward to playing a central role in the Belt and Road Initiative's international tourism development.

Closer to home, the Greater Bay Area has the means to rival Tokyo, San Francisco and New York – the world's three renowned bay areas – in tourism potential. The Bay Area's size and significance underscore that promise. With a collective population of 70 million, the Bay Area boasts a combined GDP of some US\$1.5 trillion, that is roughly the size of Australia or South Korea. The Greater Bay Area's tourism offerings are wide-ranging and undeniably inviting – from cosmopolitan, East-meets-West Hong Kong and the entertainment capital of the world, Macao, to the rich Chinese culture and heritage of the Greater Bay Area's nine Mainland cities. At the same time, the Greater Bay Area is an important source market for other economies given its high level of affluence. You will hear more in-depth sharing of what this Greater Bay Area means for international and regional tourism in one of the plenary sessions this morning.

I believe that Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to drive tourism opportunities emanating from the Belt and Road Initiative and the Greater Bay Area. And my Government is committed to realising Hong Kong's tourism potential. Last October, we published a development blueprint for Hong Kong's tourism industry. It emphasises four key strategies: diversifying our visitor source markets; offering tourism products with international and local characteristics; promoting smart tourism; and enhancing our service quality.

Enhancing connectivity is the key for the strategies to work. In this connection, our Hong Kong International Airport links more than 70 million passengers a year to 220 destinations. And we are now expanding the airport into a three-runway system. On completion in 2024, we will have the capacity to handle up to 100 million passengers a year.

On land, the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link opened at the end of September. It now offers direct connection from Hong Kong to 44 Mainland destinations. And from those destinations, the rest of China opens up through the nation's 25 000-kilometre high-speed rail network.

Then there's the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, which opened in late October and speeds us to the Greater Bay Area's western region. The impact of the bridge in bringing tourists to Hong Kong is obvious. Therefore we have been working to ensure that our tourist spots and local communities are prepared. We are also collaborating with the Zhuhai and Macao authorities to

ensure that our guests can have the best experience in Hong Kong.

I should also add that there will be a new – which is the seventh – land boundary control point between Hong Kong and Shenzhen at Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai. To be completed next year, this boundary control point will significantly shorten the time needed to travel from Hong Kong to the east of Shenzhen, and beyond. All these infrastructure projects open up new opportunities barely reachable before and provide a solid foundation for Hong Kong to serve as an international gateway of the Greater Bay Area.

Hong Kong has received about 60 million visitors so far this year, including over 13 million international visitors, and was ranked as the most visited city in the world by Euromonitor International. Coupled with the fact that Hong Kong is the world's freest economy and China's most international city, Hong Kong is best positioned to leverage the vast tourism potential of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Greater Bay Area development. We are prepared to grasp these opportunities ahead of us, and we welcome you to join us.

My thanks to colleagues in the Tourism Commission, the Hong Kong Tourism Board and the Tourism Industry Council for organising today's timely and welcome Tourism Convention. I wish you all a memorable stay in Hong Kong, and with Christmas and New Year approaching, a very merry Christmas and a prosperous year ahead. Also, I invite you to see for yourself what makes Hong Kong Asia's world city – the most visited city in the world. Thank you very much.

