

Speech by CE at opening ceremony of 7th ICAC Symposium (English only) (with photo/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the opening ceremony of the 7th ICAC Symposium today (May 22):

Chief Justice Ma (Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, Mr Geoffrey Ma Tao-li), Secretary General Wen (Secretary General of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), Mr Wen Hongwu), Deputy Commissioner Zhao (Deputy Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR, Mr Zhao Jiankai), Simon (Commissioner of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), Mr Simon Peh), Ms Andersen (Executive Director of the World Justice Project, Ms Elizabeth Andersen), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. I am honoured to be here to open the 7th ICAC Symposium, jointly organised by the ICAC and the World Justice Project.

Through their concerted efforts, the symposium has attracted well over 500 professionals from more than 50 countries and regions. We have here today anti-corruption experts and law enforcers, judges, prosecutors and legal practitioners, regulators, compliance officers, auditors and academics. Despite their different backgrounds, they all share a deep-rooted commitment to fighting corruption, to building a fair, prosperous and inclusive society for all.

This symposium is also a welcome opportunity to acknowledge the 45th anniversary of the ICAC, and to pay tribute to the Commission's critical role in helping to realise today's Hong Kong, one of the most law-abiding societies in the world.

Corruption was once part of the everyday lives of the people of Hong Kong. Bribery and extortion were rife. To quote from the ICAC's own history: "Ambulance crews would demand tea money before picking up a sick person ... Offering bribes to the right officials was also necessary when applying for public housing, schooling and other public services. Corrupt police officers offered protection to vice, gambling and drug activities ... Corruption had become a major social problem in Hong Kong, but the Government at the time seemed powerless to deal with it."

But that was history. In response, the ICAC was born. From its beginnings, in February 1974, it made a difference, and a very significant one. Over the years, it has brought about a profound transformation in our day-to-day lives. The Commission has wiped out systemic and syndicated corruption in the civil service and reduced overall corruption to minimal

levels in business and the larger community. No less laudatory, its anti-corruption standards and best practices for business organisations are commended and applied worldwide.

Today, Hong Kong boasts a vibrant international economy underpinned by the rule of law and free enterprise. Indeed, Hong Kong has been ranked the freest economy in the world for the past 25 years in a row by the Washington-based Heritage Foundation.

In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Hong Kong is consistently ranked among the cleanest economies in the world. In the 2018 Index, Hong Kong placed 14th out of 180 countries and territories, alongside Austria and Iceland, and ahead of such countries as Belgium, Ireland, Japan, France and the United States.

In the latest Rule of Law Index, published in February by the World Justice Project, Hong Kong was ranked 16th among 126 countries and territories for its overall rule of law performance. We placed ninth, overall, in the "absence of corruption" category.

All these rankings show that we've come an extraordinarily long distance – from a hotbed of vice to one of the world's least-corrupt societies. There are clear and compelling reasons behind this sweeping change.

First, since its establishment, the ICAC has operated with an independent status ensured, initially through the colonial government, and since 1997, by the Basic Law. And, from the beginning, the ICAC adopted an anti-graft strategy combining law enforcement, corruption prevention and public education. That strategy, I'm pleased to say, is time tested and remains effective to this day.

These efforts, however, would have been futile without our unwavering adherence to the rule of law, the defining ideology of Hong Kong, and a formidable system of checks and balances. They include an independent judiciary, independent advisory committees monitoring the ICAC's work and a free and enterprising press.

No less vital, the people of Hong Kong have, from the beginning, spoken out against corruption. Today, they treasure the core values of honesty and wholeheartedly support Hong Kong's anti-corruption efforts. In that regard, I believe that the ICAC's wide-ranging public education initiatives make a significant difference. It begins with our civil service, which is 190,000-strong. The ICAC's Ethical Leadership Programme brings together more than 150 Ethics Officers from all government departments and bureaux. Through regular integrity training, the Commission reached over 32,000 government officers at all levels last year.

Then there's the Business Ethics Development Centre, established in 1995 under the ICAC's Community Relations Department. It works with 10 local chambers of commerce. Last year, the Commission's preventive education programmes reached some 44,000 employees at every level.

The ICAC also develops education programmes for our youth and at every stage, from kindergarten right through to university. Such online platforms as Instagram, YouTube and Facebook have been used to promote anti-graft messages. Last year, the Commission launched a multi-language publicity programme to communicate our probity culture to ethnic minorities and new arrivals in Hong Kong.

There's a great deal more to the ICAC's public education programme. But to take just one additional example, the Commission produces TV drama series based on completed cases. These are used to educate the public about corruption and enlist their support in preventing it. The latest drama series was broadcast from April into this month and I have heard positive comments about it.

The ICAC's annual household survey conducted by independent polling institutions consistently finds that the Hong Kong public is highly intolerant of corruption. In last year's survey, on a scale of zero to 10, with zero representing total rejection and 10 total tolerance of corruption, the mean score came in at 0.5. In addition, 98.4 per cent of the respondents said they had not personally come across corruption in the past 12 months. That, ladies and gentlemen, makes a powerful statement about the lack of corruption in Hong Kong.

With our success, the ICAC is prepared to share its experience with its counterparts. In fact, from its early days, the ICAC has attached great importance to establishing and maintaining rapport with overseas anti-corruption and law-enforcement agencies.

The accession of Mainland China to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in 2006 opened up new communications opportunities for the ICAC. Under the Convention, the Mainland has designated the ICAC as the agency in Hong Kong to assist other state parties in building anti-corruption capacity.

Since 2017, the ICAC has stepped up its efforts in anti-corruption training for Belt and Road countries, particularly the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations within the United Nations Convention. That's what I refer to as capacity building, and we've made it one of Hong Kong's contributions to the Belt and Road's people-to-people connectivity.

Indeed, the ICAC has initiated communication already with more than 40 Belt and Road countries. To date, it has provided four tailor-made training programmes for more than 100 participants – from Cambodia, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Vietnam. Similar training arrangements for the anti-corruption agencies of Bhutan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Serbia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste are in the pipeline. In addition, over the past two years, the ICAC has presented a Chief Investigators' Command Course to some 60 participants. They came from 12 overseas countries, many also along the Belt and Road, and from the Mainland, Macao and Hong Kong.

Corruption remains a global issue today and is affecting all countries,

rich and poor, north and south. The World Economic Forum estimates that the global cost of corruption is at least US\$2.6 trillion. That's 5 per cent of the world's gross domestic product. And the World Bank tells us that businesses and individuals pay more than US\$1 trillion in bribes each and every year. In the words of the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, corruption robs societies of schools, hospitals and other vital services, drives away foreign investment and strips nations of their natural resources. The global efforts in fighting corruption must therefore continue. This symposium is an excellent opportunity for the ICAC and other anti-corruption agencies all over the world to exchange experience, ideas and initiatives, and will help enhance the effectiveness of this global fight against corruption. I wish you all a very rewarding three days at the Symposium and, for our guests from overseas and the Mainland, a very pleasant stay in Hong Kong.

Ladies and gentlemen, I declare the 7th ICAC Symposium open. Thank you very much.

