

Speech by CE at Opening of the Hong Kong Legal Week 2020 cum Opening of Hong Kong Legal Hub (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Opening of the Hong Kong Legal Week 2020 cum Opening of Hong Kong Legal Hub today (November 2):

Chief Justice Ma (Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, Mr Geoffrey Ma Tao-li), Deputy Director He Jing (Deputy Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)), Mr Li Jiangzhou (Deputy Head of the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR), Deputy Commissioner Zhao Jiankai (Deputy Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR), Teresa (Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC), Simon (Commissioner of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, Mr Simon Peh), ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to join you today to celebrate the opening of the Hong Kong Legal Week 2020, as well as the opening of the Hong Kong Legal Hub. I believe it is not mere coincidence that the Secretary for Justice has put the two events together. Indeed, both underline the importance we attach to the rule of law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China.

The Hong Kong Legal Week, inaugurated last year, is another important initiative of the Department of Justice following the very successful Prosecution Week held every year since 2012. The Legal Week aims to promote legal and dispute resolution services in Hong Kong. Last year, legal experts from over 30 jurisdictions participated. This year, global participants can join the events virtually via the webinar series, making it an even bigger event. I am sure participants will thoroughly enjoy the experience.

This annual Legal Week is the brainchild of my dear colleague, Teresa, the Secretary for Justice. I will let her tell you more about this year's event and recent developments in Hong Kong's legal and dispute resolution services. But I will share with you more about the Legal Hub which is made possible by the preservation of the former Central Government Offices (CGO) – the East Wing, Main Wing and West Wing.

Following a decision to relocate the Central Government Offices to the Tamar Complex announced in 2002, senior officials had been pondering over the use of this precious site in the heart of Central. The three office buildings were constructed after the Second World War which did not qualify them to become historic buildings in those early days of Hong Kong's heritage policy,

not to mention being a declared monument to be placed under statutory protection like the former French Mission Building which we are now in. Indeed, architecture-wise, these buildings had been described by some as "ugly match boxes". On the other hand, there was no doubt that the Government would make a fortune by selling the site for commercial use.

I was appointed in 2007 as the first Secretary for Development in the HKSAR Government given the unenviable task of balancing development with conservation as well as meeting growing public aspirations for preserving Hong Kong's built heritage as much as possible. I was then working with the Hong Kong Jockey Club over the preservation of the Central Police Station Compound, now the Tai Kwun – Centre for Heritage and Arts; and it struck me then what a great pity it would be to see these government buildings gone. I realised that this site has been the seat of government since the very early days of Hong Kong, and is very much a core part of Hong Kong's history. A UK heritage consultant was then commissioned to assess the historic value of the site and the buildings. The consultant pointed out that unlike other historic buildings which had been transformed into leisure places, hotels and restaurants, the challenge of this site and the buildings was in finding a suitable use that would be commensurate with its stature and solemnity.

To cut a long story short, together with the then Secretary for Justice, the Honourable Wong Yan-lung, we persuaded the then Chief Executive to retain these buildings as dedicated offices for the Department of Justice, which used to be housed in a multi-user government building in Queensway. To make sure this plan will materialise, CGO and the former French Mission Building, occupied by the Judiciary as the Court of Final Appeal from 1997 to 2015, were included in the Conserving Central initiative announced in the 2009 Policy Address.

In 2012, spearheaded by the then Secretary for Justice, the Honourable Rimsky Yuen, of course with my strong support as the then Chief Secretary for Administration, the Government made the further decision to allocate part of the renovated offices in the West Wing to local, regional and international legal and dispute resolution institutions. Subsequently, in anticipation of the keen demand for spaces, we decided to include the former French Mission Building and part of the Two Exchange Square in the project. This initiative actually signifies a change in government mindset, that is, in order to stay competitive amidst competitions in the region, the Government has to offer some incentives. Convenient offices in the heart of Hong Kong's Central Business District is clearly an effective one, judging by the number of legal institutions that will be housed in the Legal Hub, along with my government lawyers in the now-called Justice Place. With such extensive involvement in this project, you could imagine my gratification in seeing the Legal Hub come to life.

The conversion of the Central Government Offices and the former French Mission Building into the Legal Hub not only marks yet another milestone in Hong Kong's heritage conservation, but speaks loud and clear of the Government's commitment to the rule of law in Hong Kong. The presence of prominent local, regional and international law-related organisations in the

Legal Hub strengthens and consolidates Hong Kong's status as a leading international centre for legal, deal-making and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region.

Hong Kong is indeed an ideal place for legal services. Since Hong Kong's return to the motherland in 1997, we have successfully implemented "One Country, Two Systems" and maintained the common law system buttressed by a staunchly independent judiciary which is widely recognised by the international community. Our advantage is unique, being the only common law jurisdiction within China, while at the same time a gateway to China. Leveraging on our strengths in the free market economy, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, and unwavering support from our motherland, Hong Kong has developed into an international financial, trade and logistics centre. At the last count, over 9 000 overseas and Mainland companies have established offices here in Hong Kong, many of which are using Hong Kong as their regional headquarters.

The rule of law and judicial independence are the cornerstone of Hong Kong's success and are constitutionally enshrined in the Basic Law. Speaking of the Basic Law, this year marks the 30th anniversary of its promulgation. In celebration, the Department of Justice will be hosting a legal symposium here right in this building on November 17, and I look forward to your participation.

Ladies and gentlemen, needless to say, the violent protests during the social unrest last year has undermined respect for and public perception of the rule of law, and exposed the shortcomings in our regime with regard to safeguarding national security. The National People's Congress decision to enact the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the National Security Law) and include it in Annex 3 of the Basic Law for implementation in Hong Kong is both timely and essential. Since then, law and order and stability in society has been restored and we now have an enhanced system for Hong Kong to accurately and comprehensively implement the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. Despite unjustified attacks by some foreign politicians and governments, I and my Government will continue to steadfastly implement the National Security Law without fear or worry.

It is sad to see that during the year, such unjustified attacks have also been mounted against our judicial officers. This is not to be tolerated. As guardian of the public interest, and in seeking to uphold the rule of law and safeguard the administration of justice, the Secretary for Justice applied to the Court last Friday for an ex parte injunction to restrain persons from unlawfully and wilfully carrying out doxxing activities against our judicial officers and their family members.

As Chief Justice Ma said in his statement on September 23 this year, courts and judges are not above criticism but such criticism must be informed, solidly based and properly made. Otherwise it would be detrimental to public confidence in the administration of justice and ultimately to the rule of law of Hong Kong.

I echo the concerns of the Chief Justice and the Secretary for Justice and would once again urge everyone in society, regardless of his or her political stance, to support the rule of law and respect the courts, judges and their rulings.

Before I end, I wish to commend the Architectural Services Department and thank everyone involved in bringing these aged buildings back to life, equipped with modern features and technology. It is a job very well done.

I wish you all a fruitful conference in the coming days, and wish the Hong Kong Legal Hub a long-lasting success. Thank you very much.

