

# Speech by DCS at Kuwait National Day Reception (English only)

Following is the speech by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, at the Kuwait National Day Reception today (February 22):

Your Excellency Ambassador Naser S Al-Ghanim (Consul General of the State of Kuwait in Hong Kong), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. I am pleased to be here with you tonight in honour of the 63rd National Day of the State of Kuwait.

I am particularly delighted that this year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the State of Kuwait and Hong Kong.

Kuwait was the first Gulf Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with China and the first country in the Middle East to sign a Belt and Road co-operation agreement with China. These and other bilateral initiatives provide a strong foundation for mutually rewarding relations between China-Kuwait, and Hong Kong-Kuwait.

President Xi Jinping has met twice, most recently at the opening ceremony of the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, with the current Amir, His Highness Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah.

As President Xi said at the Asian Games, "China is ready to work with Kuwait to take these bilateral ties to new heights."

So it was heartening to hear the Consul General, just a few minutes ago, say that under the new Amir's leadership, the Kuwaiti government has stressed its commitment to developing bilateral relations with Hong Kong – indeed, to "elevating them to higher levels to cover all areas and sectors."

Hong Kong places great importance on our relations with Kuwait and the Middle East. That's why we established a Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (ETO) in the Middle East in October 2021. Its mandate is to strengthen ties with the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Kuwait.

Since the ETO's establishment, we are seeing more frequent, mutual visits by senior government officials and corporate leaders.

In April this year, the Secretary-General of the GCC, His Excellency Jasem Mohamed Albudaiwi, a Kuwaiti national, is also scheduled to visit Hong Kong.

Last May, the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, Hong Kong, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area Entrepreneurs Union put together a delegation to visit Kuwait, along with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. That visit was realised with tremendous assistance rendered by the Consulate. And it resulted in an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chinese General Chamber.

Hong Kong values its trade ties with Kuwait. In 2022, bilateral trade exceeded US\$200 million, up nearly 15 per cent, year on year, and that is in spite of the pandemic.

We welcome more Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and companies to make use of Hong Kong's singular strengths and strategic advantages. Through Hong Kong, you can tap into unprecedented business and investment opportunities. They include such national development strategies as the Belt and Road Initiative, to which Kuwait is a signatory, and the Greater Bay Area, which celebrates its fifth anniversary this month.

As the Consul General noted, we are working to finalise two MOUs, as well as the formation of a joint committee. The committee will investigate how best to expand our good and growing bilateral ties.

Its efforts will, I hope, include culture. As you know, Hong Kong is dedicated to rising as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, with the full support of our nation.

And your Consulate is a strong proponent of cultural exchanges between our two economies. Last November, at the inaugural edition of the Asia+ Festival, the Consulate showcased Kuwait's remarkable culture and traditions at its pavilion, alongside 20 other countries. We look forward to more artistic co-operation between our two cultures, and our two peoples, in the coming months and years.

Education, too, is an area of clear promise, as today's honouring of 11 Kuwaiti students, in just a few minutes, underlines. The students are working on their post-graduate degrees in dentistry at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), thanks to scholarships from the Kuwait Ministry of Health.

The Ministry selected HKU for the students because of its international reputation in dentistry – and, I hasten to add, a good many other things, too. Thank you.

Allow me now to propose a toast: To the people of the State of Kuwait on its proud national day.

Cheers!