

Speech by FS at InterCham Hong Kong Business Luncheon (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the InterCham Hong Kong Business Luncheon today (September 11):

President Van Der Stichele (the President of InterCham Scholarship Fund, Mr Christof Van Der Stichele), Victor (the Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association, Mr Victor Dawes, SC), Consuls-General, Chamber Presidents and Officers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon to you all. Thank you for coming despite the challenging weather. It gives me great pleasure to join you for today's InterCham Business Luncheon, which is a welcome opportunity to talk to the world, to Hong Kong's influential diplomatic, business and legal communities, and to do so in one inviting room and over an equally inviting lunch.

I am, of course, only your appetiser. The main conversational course comes with the lunch itself with its thought-provoking topic: "Can Foreign Businesses still Trust Hong Kong's Legal System?" This will be led by Victor, the Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association. Like all of you, I look forward to Victor's keynote speech and the fireside chat to follow.

But for the next few minutes, I am happy to share with you a few thoughts on the state of our legal system. As you all know, it is based on the common law. This ensures fair hearing; equally important is that our institutional set-up continues to ensure access to justice. And the judiciary exercises its power independently. Our legal system is the cornerstone of the very trust and confidence investors and business people have in doing business here.

Yet there has been no lack of negative narrative about it, especially since the implementation of the National Security Law back in 2020. This has unfortunately led to an emerging sentiment in the West that Hong Kong is becoming less and less distinct from the Mainland.

I am here to tell you that this is a misplaced sentiment. I believe foreign businesses and diplomats who work, live or raise your families here would agree with me. I believe you would continue to see the rule of law at work, functioning as it should be, day after day here in Hong Kong.

Victor will surely share his thoughts on this.

But allow me to add one point. The Central Government is entirely committed to maintaining the "one country, two systems" principle in the long term. That commitment has been made consistently and clearly. It was made by

President Xi during his visit in Hong Kong in July last year. It was made at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China last October. And again in March, at the annual high-level meetings in Beijing.

No doubt it is our country's compelling interest to ensure Hong Kong as an IFC (international financial centre) and as the premier gateway for trade, investment, talent and travel between the Mainland and the rest of the world.

This is compellingly illustrated by the roles that our country has given us under the 14th Five-Year Plan. Hong Kong is tasked with serving as the international or regional hub in eight discrete areas: finance, innovation and technology, aviation, maritime, trade, legal and dispute resolution, intellectual property trading, and also as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange.

These roles require Hong Kong to maintain – and emphatically so – our much trusted common legal system and our regulatory systems, which align with the world's best standards, as well as free flow of goods, capital, information and people, and ultimately a friendly business environment.

Looking to the future, be assured of the unwavering support of our nation and Hong Kong's long-standing connectivity with the world. I have high confidence on the prospects and promise of business and the finance here.

In the short to medium term, our economic growth will be powered by two main engines, namely financial services and innovation and technology. "One country, two systems" is very important in this respect. Take financial services as an example. The common law system is underpinning international financial centres.

For developing innovation and technology, free flow of information, talent, data are all very important for such industries as artificial intelligence and big data analytics; not to mention the ability to attract enterprises and talent.

"One country, two systems" and the common law legal system are here to stay. Our commitment is firm.

But we need to do more. Here in Hong Kong, from the Government to the business sector, we all know very well their importance, but we have to communicate our commitment to the outside world. As I mentioned earlier, for different reasons – misunderstanding, information gaps, etc – narratives about Hong Kong in the US, in Europe, are not very positive.

After all, we had gone through difficulties, with COVID-19 somewhat cutting us off from the rest of the world for over three years. Many people haven't had the chance to visit Hong Kong and see for themselves the real situation on the ground.

I believe seeing is believing. Going forward, an important strategy of the Government is to invite as many business visitors as possible, from

business travellers to think-tanks, and from investors to tourists, to come to Hong Kong. Then, they would have the opportunity to talk to their business associates, contacts, friends and other people here so that they could gauge the situation, and compare with what they have read or seen from the media.

In the coming few months, a lot of mega events will take place in Hong Kong. Just in the next few days, we will organise the Belt and Road Summit. In October, we will hold the annual Fintech Week which will attract around three to four thousand people. In November, we will have the Global Financial Leaders' Investment Summit. Last year, when I said in the Budget that we were going to organise the first Global Financial Leaders' Investment Summit, there was some suspicion whether it was really going to happen. But we proved we did, and the global financial community was keen to come to Hong Kong to learn the situation here first-hand and to reap the business opportunities here. So, we are going to do the expanded version this year.

There will be also be a Bloomberg regulatory forum in October. And In December, the FII (Future Investment Initiative) Institute, from the Middle East, is going to host their first Asian Summit in Hong Kong. More events are coming in the first half of next year.

We also need to go out, too. The Chief Executive, a few other Secretaries and I have been making overseas visits and leading delegations to the Middle East, Southeast Asia and other places. I will be leaving for Europe at the end of this week. And we need your help. We need the help of the business community, and indeed everybody. Do talk to your friends in your visits and tell them what Hong Kong is like. To tell them the opportunities in Hong Kong and our competitive advantages, particularly using Hong Kong as a gateway for easy access to the GBA (Greater Bay Area), to the Mainland and even as a hub for the entire Asia Pacific.

Thank you very much for having me this afternoon. Thank you!

