

# Speech by FS at Italian National Day celebration concert (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the Italian National Day celebration concert today (June 1):

Consul General (Consul General of Italy in Hong Kong, Mr Clemente Contestabile), Director Wang (Director-General of the Consular Department of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr Wang Jiarong), your excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Buona sera. Good evening. I'm honoured to be here in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Italian Republic: Festa della Repubblica.

And what better way to celebrate Republic Day than tonight's "Concerto Italiano", an inspired tribute to some of Italy's, and in fact the world's, musical masterpieces.

No less satisfying for the music lovers is the collaboration that has made this memorable evening possible. Mr Lorenzo Iosco from Italy, the Hong Kong Philharmonic (Hong Kong Phil)'s bass clarinetist, is conducting the Hong Kong Phil's ensemble this evening. And special guests range from Hong Kong's internationally celebrated tenor, Warren Mok, to soprano Louise Kwong, a former member of the Young Artist Program of Rome Opera House.

Hong Kong and Italy have long co-operated – in music, as in business, finance and much else. Our bilateral trade this past year has, unfortunately, been affected by the pandemic. No surprise there. But I'm pleased to say that nearly 10 per cent of the total merchandise trade between Italy and the Mainland last year was routed through Hong Kong. Some US\$5 billion in all.

That speaks, and clearly, of the singular role Hong Kong plays as the multilevel bridge between the Mainland and the rest of the world.

Consider that more than 170 Italian companies call Hong Kong home. They embrace everything from banking and fashion to food and beverage, transport and logistics, and much more. And the majority of them maintain their regional headquarters and regional offices in Hong Kong.

They're here because they know that Hong Kong's deepening economic integration with the Mainland will only expand prospects for Italian companies – in Hong Kong and throughout the Mainland.

That's thanks to our "one country, two systems" unique arrangement, to our world-class financial and professional services sectors, to the free flow of capital, talent and information, to the rule of law and judicial independence, and to the many other advantages Hong Kong offers businesses

and investors.

Those advantages will prove particularly significant in tapping the far-reaching promise of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The region is poised to expand Hong Kong's marketplace tenfold, giving business and investors, as well as cultural and technology concerns, a market counting some 72 million consumers, all eager to embrace, and soon, the post-pandemic era.

That time is coming, ladies and gentlemen. Hong Kong is in a good place now. We have worked hard and well to keep COVID-19 in check. And our vaccination programme, under way now for three months, is free to all Hong Kong residents 16 and over.

If you've yet to be vaccinated, I urge you to do so, as soon as you can. Our vaccination centres are open seven days a week, public holidays included.

We are determined to get back to work and enjoying life, too. And it's no surprise to this speaker that so many of the pleasures that make life enjoyable speak Italian – in design, style and, yes, wine and pasta.

I'm confident that Italy, under its new, internationally respected Prime Minister, Mario Draghi, will emerge confident and strong – and play a pivotal role in helping the European Union do the same.

This evening's concert symbolises that ardent expectation. Embodies the faith the people of Italy and Hong Kong have in the future. In our shared future.

My congratulations to the great nation of Italy on its national day.

Consul General, ladies and gentlemen, I propose a toast to the people of the Italian Republic.

