

Government to set up working group on mediation

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Wong Yan Lung, SC, said today (November 30) that a cross-sector working group on mediation, comprising representatives from the Department of Justice, the Judiciary, the legal profession and mediation bodies as well as academic experts, would be set up to develop mediation services in Hong Kong.

Addressing some 200 guests at the Conference Luncheon of "Mediation in Hong Kong: The Way Forward", Mr Wong said this was a pledge of the Chief Executive in his latest policy address.

While noting the importance of educating the public of what mediation was and what benefits it could bring, Mr Wong said the working group would look at the overall strategy in promoting mediation services in Hong Kong.

As a global financial centre, Hong Kong must have a full range of dispute resolution facilities to strengthen its position in this competitive world, Mr Wong said.

"We want to improve the access to justice. We want to help the ordinary people resolve disputes by quicker and more cost-effective ways," he added.

"We also want to foster a more harmonious society where seven million of us are living very closely to one another and mostly in high-rise buildings." Mr Wong said.

Mr Wong said that in Hong Kong, mediation had already established very steady foothold in specific areas, such as construction, family and building management disputes.

The Government plans to establish mediation in legally-aided matrimonial cases as a permanent feature of the legal aid service, and is working on the detailed features of the permanent scheme.

In addition, the Lands Tribunal has recently introduced a pilot scheme to encourage parties to building management disputes to resolve their cases by mediation before or after they issue proceedings in the Lands Tribunal.

The Conference, being held today and tomorrow (December 1), is jointly organised by the Faculty of Law of The University of Hong Kong, the Judiciary, the Department of Justice, the Bar Association, the Law Society, the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre, the Hong Kong Mediation Centre and the Hong Kong Mediation Council.

The Hon Chief Justice Andrew Kwok-nang Li, and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, Professor Lap-Chee Tsui, officiated at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference today. The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak Sing, will give welcoming remarks at the conference tomorrow.

Attended by overseas and local mediation experts, the two-day Conference seeks to provide an opportunity for a comparative study of mediation practices and experience in Hong Kong and other jurisdictions, and to promote mediation and alternative dispute resolution in Hong Kong.

The first day of the conference featured experience sharing sessions by speakers from Australia, Canada, Europe and the USA. The role of mediation service providers and the use of mediation in public sector initiatives and commercial disputes were also discussed.

On the second day, local mediation experts from the business sector, professional bodies, labour groups, statutory bodies, government departments and non-governmental organisations will study the application of mediation in building management, labour disputes and family disputes.

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