

HK's legal profession provides high-end services (with photos)

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Wong Yan Lung, SC, told the Hong Kong Legal Services Forum in Shanghai today (July 6) that the legal profession in Hong Kong, being well versed in laws relating to international finance and trade and having a comprehensive international network, was capable of providing international and high-end legal services.

Sharing the same language and culture with the Mainland, Hong Kong's legal profession is also able to deliver legal services concerning Mainland parties more efficiently and effectively.

With the new constitutional order under the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, Hong Kong maintains its common law system that is familiar to the international community. Judicial independence is guaranteed by Hong Kong's constitution. Judicial officers are well-recognised for their international standards. The highly effective and fair system has been a source of confidence and protection to international investors.

Mr Wong said, "With China becoming a major force of global economic growth and with growing demand for cross-boundary legal services, I believe that the legal professions in the two places can foster closer cooperation and provide even better services to their clients.

"To date, 65 Hong Kong law firms have set up representative offices in 14 Mainland cities, of which 31 firms were set up after the implementation of CEPA. There are altogether six Hong Kong law firms that have entered into association with Mainland law firms to develop their practice in both places."

He said, "The Department of Justice is strongly committed to promoting mutual legal assistance between the two places. Currently, we have put in place arrangements for mutual service of judicial documents, mutual enforcement of arbitral awards and reciprocal enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters. Apart from regular reviews of the implementation of these arrangements to refine the framework for mutual legal assistance, we are also taking steps to identify new areas of cooperation in response to the needs of our community. For example, in order to cater for the development of society, we are exploring with the Mainland authorities the feasibility of reciprocal recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial and family matters."

The Secretary for Justice also briefed forum participants on Hong Kong's latest developments in arbitration services and its efforts in enhancing the arbitration regime and promoting its services.

The cases handled by the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre (HKIAC) have been on the increase in recent years. In 2009, the HKIAC handled a total of 429 arbitration cases, representing a year-on-year increase of 15%, and over one third of the cases involved at least one Mainland party. Figures in this respect are also rising annually.

Mr Wong said that Hong Kong would continue to foster closer cooperation between local arbitration institutions and their Mainland and international counterparts, with a view to developing Hong Kong as a hub for commercial arbitration in the Asia Pacific region.

The Hong Kong Legal Services Forum is one of the major fringe events held by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government during its participation in Expo 2010 Shanghai China. Organised by the Department of Justice, the forum aims to showcase Hong Kong's strengths and the latest developments in its legal and arbitration services to corporate and legal sectors on the Mainland to enhance mutual cooperation by sharing experiences. Veteran lawyers from the Hong Kong Bar Association and the Law Society of Hong Kong, as well as world renowned arbitrators from the HKIAC and the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce, served as moderators and speakers. They discussed with participants legal and risk management issues in international trade and investment as well as practical issues in resolving commercial disputes.

The forum has received an overwhelming response from Mainland organisations. More than 500 legal practitioners, businessmen and officials attended the event.

Ends/Tuesday, July 6, 2010