

Asia Pacific Regional Office of Hague Conference opens in HK

The setting up of the new Asia Pacific Regional Office (Regional Office) of the Hague Conference on Private International Law (Hague Conference) in Hong Kong not only marks a new chapter for the Hague Conference but also constitutes a significant vote of confidence in Hong Kong's position both as a regional legal services centre and as a springboard for the Hague Conference to further develop its work and extend its influence in the region, the Secretary for Justice, Mr Rimsky Yuen, SC, said today (December 13).

Mr Yuen was speaking at the opening ceremony of the Regional Office held at Government House this afternoon.

He said that with the strong support from the Central People's Government (CPG), the Council on General Affairs and Policy of the Hague Conference decided in April this year to set up its second regional office in Hong Kong, in addition to its Latin American regional office in Buenos Aires.

"The Hague Conventions stand out as shining examples of a pool of international instruments, in the field of private international law on various subject matters, which may be conveniently tapped into by any state in the region. Many of these instruments have been tested by time and actual cases, and we can testify that they have served Hong Kong very well over the years," Mr Yuen said.

At the ceremony today, the Chief Executive, Mr C Y Leung, witnessed the signing of the Host Country Agreement and the Memorandum of Administrative Arrangements relating to the establishment of the Regional Office. The Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the CPG, Mr Cui Tiankai, represented the CPG to sign the Host Country Agreement, while Mr Yuen represented the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government to sign the Memorandum of Administrative Arrangements with the Secretary General of the Hague Conference, Mr Hans van Loon.

Mr Cui said that establishing the Regional Office in Hong Kong was an important strategic decision by the Hague Conference on its long-term

development.

"Relying on the advantages of Hong Kong, a vibrant international city where the Eastern culture meets Western culture, I trust that the Regional Office will surely meet people's expectations. It will be a gateway for the Hague Conference to extend its influence and serve as a platform for further co-operation in the Asia-Pacific region. China will, as before, actively participate in its activities and give strong support to the work of the Regional Office," Mr Cui said.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr van Loon expressed his gratitude to the CPG and the HKSAR Government for their support in setting up the Regional Office.

He said that the new office would serve as a base of operations to publicise the Hague Conventions, which have been proved to be adaptable to the needs of different regions and provide a connection to the global community.

"The task of the Hague Conference on Private International Law is to develop and service such multilateral legal instruments, Conventions, which, despite the differences between legal systems, will allow individuals as well as companies to enjoy a high degree of legal security. For this reason, I am certain that the new Asia Pacific Regional Office here in Hong Kong will be a tremendous asset for years to come," he said.

The office is the second regional office of the Hague Conference and the first in the region. Initially it comprises a Representative, an office manager and legal officers seconded by the Member States of the Hague Conference.

The Honourable Mr Justice Hartmann will be the first Representative of the Hague Conference for the Asia Pacific region.

The Hague Conference is a leading global intergovernmental organisation in the field of private international law. It develops and services multilateral legal instruments on private international law, commonly known as the Hague Conventions, which respond to global needs.

There are now over 130 countries that are party to one or more of the Hague Conventions.

In addition to its statutory mission for progressive unification of private international law rules ranging from commercial law and banking law to international civil procedure and from child protection to matters of marriage and personal status, it also fosters international judicial and administrative co-operation in the area of private law, especially in the fields of protection of the family and children, of civil procedure and commercial law. China is a member of the Hague Conference and representatives from the HKSAR participate in the work of the Hague Conference as members of the Chinese delegation.

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