

Welcome remarks by SJ at thematic breakout session "Hong Kong: Super Connector · World-class Springboard - Professional Services Empowering Global Expansion" at 11th Belt and Road Summit (English only) (with photos)

Following are the welcome remarks by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at the thematic breakout session "Hong Kong: Super Connector · World-class Springboard - Professional Services Empowering Global Expansion" at the 11th Belt and Road Summit today (September 9):

Mr Umiraliyev (First Deputy Prosecutor General of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr Umiraliyev Zhandos Zhanibekovich), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this thematic breakout session of the 11th Belt and Road Summit. Our theme this afternoon concerns the important role of professional services in assisting business enterprises to go global in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The BRI serves as the world's broadest and largest international platform for high-quality development. Co-operation agreements under the BRI invariably involve parties coming from different countries. For any enterprise which intends to expand its operations to another country, the primary challenge is that it will have little knowledge, if any at all, of the social, legal, economic and political environment of that country. This is where reliable and high-quality professional services become indispensable.

Professional services include services provided by different professionals such as lawyers, accountants, financial analysts and management consultants. They are people who have special knowledge and experience in particular areas, and in most cases, are qualified to provide their services under the law of the jurisdiction in question. Of course, the professional services required would differ depending on many variables, such as which country is involved in the co-operation, what is the nature of the subject matter of the co-operation, etc. But no matter what, I would venture to suggest that Hong Kong is where you could find and obtain whatever professional services are necessary.

Under the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China published in March this year, it is specifically mentioned that the Central Authorities support Hong Kong to deepen its participation in the BRI and use its strength in professional services to assist enterprises to go global. Accordingly, a proposal along this line was set out expressly in the public consultation document of The First Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the period of 2026 to 2030. I am confident that the First Five-Year Plan to be announced by the Chief Executive next week on September 16 will adopt such a proposal.

The question is why professional services are described and recognised as a strength of Hong Kong. The short answer is that, under the principle of "one country, two

systems", and pursuant to our Basic Law, Hong Kong maintains and develops unique legal, financial and other systems which are highly international in nature, including that they are run by professionals who have extensive knowledge and rich experience in international transactions.

Let me use legal and dispute resolution services as an example. The BRI projects inevitably generate transboundary legal issues. Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction in China, and the world's only bilingual common law jurisdiction operating in both Chinese and English, underpinned by a strong rule of law tradition. It is recognised as an international legal and dispute resolution services centre. This is attributable to a number of factors.

First, Hong Kong law remains one of the best options as the governing law for international transactions. Hong Kong ranks first in business legislation and in tax policy in the World Competitiveness Yearbook 2026 by the International Institute for Management Development. This is largely because our business law is user-friendly, familiar to the international business community, and consistent with prevailing international standards and practice.

Second, Hong Kong's legal system is not only well connected to the legal systems of other jurisdictions but also to that of the Chinese Mainland. In particular, we have so far concluded 10 mutual legal assistance arrangements in civil and commercial matters with the Chinese Mainland covering recognition and enforcement of civil and commercial judgments as well as arbitral awards, and the grant of arbitration-related interim measures. These arrangements only exist between Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland because Hong Kong is a part of China. This is an unparalleled advantage that cannot be found anywhere else.

Turning to dispute resolution, we have an independent judiciary enjoying the power of final adjudication. Not only are there eminent judges from other common law jurisdictions serving as non-permanent judges of our Court of Final Appeal, foreign judges, including both retired and serving, from other common law jurisdictions are invited to sit as deputy judges at our Court of First Instance in civil and commercial matters. The Judiciary has also announced that it will establish an International Commercial Court, and foreign judges will also be invited to sit on it. All these matters enhance the confidence of people both inside and outside Hong Kong in our judiciary, and ensure that our common law jurisprudence, in particular, in the area of international trade and commerce, will be developed with the assistance of judges from other jurisdictions and made consistent with the latest international development.

Moving on to arbitration, our arbitration ecosystem is equally world-renowned. In the 2025 International Arbitration Survey conducted by Queen Mary University of London, Hong Kong is the second most preferred arbitral seat in the world, and the most preferred arbitral seat in the Asia-Pacific region. It is noteworthy that, 84.3 per cent of all arbitrations and 92.9 per cent of all administered arbitrations submitted to the HKIAC (Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre) in 2025 were international in nature, that

means at least one party was not from Hong Kong. 45.4 per cent of all arbitrations submitted to the HKIAC in 2025 involved no Hong Kong parties. 58.2 per cent involved no Mainland Chinese parties and 13.7 per cent involved no Asian parties at all. Parties from 61 jurisdictions participated in the arbitrations submitted to the HKIAC in that year.

Mediation is becoming an important means to resolve international disputes. The International Organization for Mediation (IOMed) is the world's first intergovernmental legal organisation dedicated to resolving international disputes through mediation. It provides mediation services with respect to, among other things, commercial or investment disputes between a state and a national of another state, and also disputes arising out of or relating to international commercial relationships between private parties. So far, 46 countries have signed, and 16 of them have ratified, the Convention on the Establishment of the IOMed, and many of them are participants of the BRI. Its headquarters are established here, and it has started operation since October last year. While mediation is confidential in nature, the IOMed has announced that it has already successfully assisted in resolving a maritime dispute between a Chinese entity and a Singapore entity.

You may wonder whether, and if so, why and how Hong Kong's legal services are still relevant and useful if the governing law of the co-operation agreement is not Hong Kong law, or the place involved in the co-operation is not Hong Kong. My answer is that Hong Kong lawyers do not simply provide legal services confined to Hong Kong law. Among barristers and solicitors in Hong Kong, many of them are not only qualified to practise in Hong Kong but also in other major common law jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. As at September 2, Hong Kong law firms have 265 overseas offices around the world and 78 representative offices in the Chinese Mainland. There are 44 registered associations of Hong Kong and foreign law firms, 93 foreign law firms and 1 784 foreign registered lawyers. It is no exaggeration to say that you can find in Hong Kong lawyers practising almost anywhere in the world, as well as those who have excellent connections with lawyers in whatever jurisdiction you are concerned about.

The internationalised, high quality and reputable legal services provided by Hong Kong's legal professionals can and will undoubtedly assist in safeguarding the interests of enterprises involved in the BRI to go global effectively and efficiently. This is why we position ourselves not only as a "super connector" between the Chinese Mainland and the rest of the world but also as a "super value-adder".

That said, we appreciate that there is no room for complacency. Hong Kong has been making continuous efforts to assist enterprises involved in the BRI, in particular those from the Chinese Mainland, to go global. For example, the Department of Justice launched the Hong Kong Professional Services GoGlobal Platform to promote Hong Kong's legal services in collaboration with other professional services to support enterprises to go global. We have published the Panel List of Hong Kong Legal Services Providers Supporting "Go Global", a directory with more than 70 legal services providers across 12 categories, and the second series of the collection of more than 160 case studies

detailing how Hong Kong professionals help enterprises succeed overseas. On the other hand, the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy, launched in November 2024, has already provided capacity building programmes for more than 2 000 participants, most of whom are legal professionals coming from different jurisdictions, in relation to different areas of international legal law and practice.

Further, less than two weeks ago, I led a group of cross-professional delegates from our legal, dispute resolution, financial and accounting sectors, together with the Commissioner for Belt and Road, to Xinjiang, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The trip was very constructive in introducing our professional services, and fostering relationships with the legal and business communities in those places. I am most delighted that I made some new and good friends during the visit. One of them is Mr Umiraliyev, the First Deputy Prosecutor General of the Republic of Kazakhstan, who is with us today and has kindly agreed to deliver a keynote speech very soon on Kazakhstan's latest investor-protection framework.

In the panel discussion of today's thematic breakout session, you will hear from two complementary vantage points, the service provider and the user. Our distinguished speakers will first share insights from the service provider perspective, outlining the latest trends in outbound investments along the Belt and Road, the legal challenges faced by enterprises, and Hong Kong's one-stop professional services from deal-making to dispute resolution. The discussion will then pivot to the user and collaboration perspective, exploring Hong Kong's connectivity along the Belt and Road, the essence of collaborative success and lessons from BRI-related arbitration.

The Belt and Road is a belt to prosperity and a road to happiness. Hong Kong is fully committed to walking together with, and assisting and supporting, all participants of the BRI on the journey. On this note, I wish you all a very fruitful and constructive afternoon. Thank you.

Ends/Wednesday, September 9, 2026