

**Speech by Mr Wesley Wong SC, Solicitor General  
at the 2015 Law Society  
Pro Bono and Community Service Award Ceremony  
on 4 December 2015 (Friday)**

Chief Justice, Mr President, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here with you at the Pro Bono and Community Service Award Ceremony 2015 this evening. We have just seen awards presented to lawyers and law firms that have demonstrated active participation and outstanding commitment in *pro bono* and community work this year. May I express my warmest congratulations to all who have done voluntary work one way or another and, in particular, those of you whose efforts are being recognised and celebrated on this occasion.

2. “Pro Bono” is the short form for the Latin phrase, *pro bono publico*, which means “for the public good”. *Pro bono* work by lawyers covers a wide range of free legal services. For example, for the purpose of a recent survey conducted by the Pro Bono Committee of the Law Society, it is defined to include cases where a lawyer, without fee or at a substantially reduced fee, advises and/or represents a client in cases where –

- (i) a client has no other access to the courts and the legal system or such access is inadequate; and/or
- (ii) the client’s case raises a wider issue of public interest.

3. In fact, there has been significant global expansion in *pro bono* legal services and growing recognition in its importance in recent years. By way of example, a mandatory requirement has come into effect since 1 January 2015 in the New York State of the United States for new bar members to provide at least 50 hours of *pro bono* legal services prior to admission for legal practice.

4. A question we may ask ourselves is why the provision of free legal work is on the rise when lawyers are under an ever increasing time and billing pressure. According to a recent survey by the Law Society of

Scotland in August 2015, the principal motivations for lawyers to undertake *pro bono* work are to give something back to society and to address unmet legal need. In another survey conducted by the American Bar Association in 2013, lawyers found *pro bono* work to be extremely gratifying and that it helps to improve equal access to justice for those who cannot afford it. By engaging in *pro bono* service, you are bringing benefits not only to the vulnerable, but also to yourself, the profession and the community as a whole.

5. In Hong Kong, many lawyers recognised the ethical and social responsibility of our profession to serve the public and have volunteered their time and resources to provide free legal services to those in need and to remain connected with our communities in a meaningful way. They are also making a valuable contribution to the administration of justice and in the maintenance of the rule of law. This respect for and adherence to the rule of law is at the same time a cornerstone for the success of Hong Kong as a global financial and commercial centre and a leading hub for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region.

6. The Hong Kong Government has all along kept up with the efforts in promoting *pro bono* services by the legal profession. Our lawyers and law firms are provided with the opportunities to participate in *pro bono* legal work through a variety of programmes organised by the Home Affairs Bureau from time to time. They include for instance, the Legal Advice Scheme for Unrepresented Litigants on Civil Procedure which just commenced operation this September and the Recognition Scheme for Provision of Pro Bono Legal services re-launched in 2014.

7. May I congratulate you all again because *pro bono* legal service is work which is as important as it is valuable. As an indispensable part of our legal culture, it reflects a commitment on the part of our legal profession in the pursuit for equality and justice. On behalf of the Secretary for Justice, I also commend all of you for your unfailing efforts and encourage you not only to continue with your good work, but to inspire others to start helping others by engaging in voluntary work.

8. On this note, it remains for me to thank the Law Society of Hong Kong for running the Pro Bono and Community Service Recognition Programme.

9. Thank you.

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