

Hong Kong as a Gateway to the Asia-Pacific
A Seminar organised by UNIDROIT and the Department of Justice of the
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of
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Regional Presence of International Organizations

Speech by Dr. James Ding,
Law Officer (International Law)

Thank you Anna.

1. It is my honour to join this distinguished panel. My presentation today will focus on an important strategy for a truly global international organization, that is, through establishment of regional presence outside its headquarters.
2. In our increasingly interconnected world, there is an increasing need for more effective and efficient regionally focused operations for an international organization ("IO"). Such regional approach could greatly facilitate cross-border collaboration and enhance responsiveness to emerging challenges in different parts of the world.
3. In my presentation, I am going to outline briefly the key benefits of this approach, with reference to the experience of Hong Kong in light of our unique strengths as an international economic, financial, and legal hub, as highlighted by the Secretary for Justice during the keynote speech.

Value of Regional Presence

4. Broadly speaking, the establishment of regional presence of an IO would have the following general benefits:-
 - (1) increase visibility of the IO in the region;
 - (2) raise the international profile of the IO globally;
 - (3) expand its network with stakeholders in the region effectively;

- (4) increase the number of Member States; and
 - (5) increase the number of States adopting the relevant instruments that it has developed.
5. It is worthwhile to note that the positive values brought about by establishing regional presence are not limited to the region where the regional presence is established, but spread outside the region and across the world. For example, for an international law organization, a wider acceptance of its instruments in a region could benefit States outside the region, which have also adopted such instruments. Such adoption of multilateral instruments developed by an IO could also save a lot of time and costs for States within or outside the region by avoiding the need to develop bilateral instruments on legal cooperation with the States in the region. The adoption of the IO's instruments in a region also fosters collaboration and creates networking opportunities within and outside the region, which further raise the international profile of the IO which has developed such instruments. The increased visibility in a region can, in turn, attract attention from stakeholders worldwide, further buttressing the IO's global presence.
6. Against this context, many IOs have established their regional presence in Hong Kong, including AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre, Bank for International Settlement, Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), International Monetary Fund, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Finance Corporation.

Hong Kong's Unique Strengths

7. The regional presence of these reputable international organisations has clearly demonstrated that Hong Kong is a prime location for establishing regional presence in the heart of Asia Pacific.
8. As outlined by our Secretary for Justice at the beginning of this seminar, Hong Kong enjoys a number of unique strengths and advantages. In particular, Hong Kong has maintained our own legal system based on the common law under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" with a very strong rule of law tradition. The World Justice Project

Rule of Law Index 2024 ranks Hong Kong 23rd among 142 jurisdictions. Hong Kong is also an international dispute resolution hub, with Hong Kong as the second most preferred arbitration seat in the world and the most preferred arbitration seat in Asia. Most recently, Hong Kong has also been selected to host the International Organisation of Mediation, which will start operation in the near future. All these are important attributes attracting IOs to establish their regional presence in Hong Kong.

9. Among these IOs, I would like to use the success story of the regional office of HCCH to illustrate how an IO benefits from its regional presence in Hong Kong. Established in December 2012, the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of HCCH has achieved notable milestones over the past decade or so. From 2013 to 2024, HCCH membership from the Asia Pacific has increased by approximately 70%, while 20 States from the region have become Contracting Parties to key HCCH Conventions so that treaty relations have been established between all Contracting Parties within and outside the region with these 20 States. The Regional Office has facilitated the implementation of these instruments through training, thereby increasing HCCH's visibility and expanding its network with regional stakeholders. Overall, the regional presence has not only elevated the profile of HCCH but have also demonstrated the practical benefits of its instruments, creating positive impacts globally.

Proposal for a liaison office of UNIDROIT in Hong Kong

10. With reference to the success story of HCCH and with strong support from our Central Government, we have discussed with the secretariat of UNIDROIT for a proposal of establishing a liaison office in Hong Kong. The proposal has been discussed at the UNIDROIT Governing Council meeting in May this year and the Governing Council has agreed to recommend this proposal to the UNIDROIT General Assembly for decision in December. We hope that the General Assembly will adopt the proposal so that the UNIDROIT liaison office could be established in Hong Kong next year.
11. Where UNIDROIT establishes a liaison office in Hong Kong, it could

create synergies and strengthen connections with other international organisations and law-related bodies in the Hong Kong Legal Hub. In the field of capacity building, there is a lot of potential to enhance collaboration with other international organizations or bodies in Hong Kong. For example, in recent years, we supported the Hague Academy of International Law's Advanced Courses in Hong Kong, Training Sessions of the China – AALCO Exchange and Research Program on International Law and a number of APEC capacity-building workshops.

12. In 2024, the Department of Justice further launched the International Legal Talents Training Academy to organise practical training courses, seminars, as well as international exchange programmes to promote exchanges among talents. The Academy looks forward to collaborating with international organizations which have their presence in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

13. To conclude, the establishment of regional presence of IOs represents a unique opportunity to enhance collaboration among key stakeholders, and strengthen the world's collective efforts in taking forward international law initiatives which resonate with the communities we serve, thereby casting a more meaningful and lasting impact.
14. As testified by the regional presence of many IOs in Hong Kong, our city is well-positioned as a hub, a bridge, and a platform for global partnership. We believe UNIDROIT would be of no exception, and we look forward to welcoming the regional presence of UNIDROIT in Hong Kong in the near future. Thank you.