

Opening remarks by the Secretary for Justice at the press conference on matters concerning the West Wing of the former Central Government Offices and Ho Tung Gardens

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Following is the English translation of the opening remarks by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Rimsky Yuen, SC, at the press conference on matters concerning the West Wing of the former Central Government Offices and Ho Tung Gardens today (December 4):

Dear friends from the media, I am glad to be here to speak on the plan on the reuse of the West Wing of the former Central Government Offices (CGO). The Department of Justice (DoJ) greatly welcomes the plan to allocate the West Wing for use by the DoJ and law-related non-government organisations (NGOs). The plan reflects the importance the government has attached to the legal work and the preservation of rule of law, as well as its commitment to upholding the rule of law as the core value of Hong Kong. As a matter of fact, since my predecessor Mr Wong Yan Lung, SC, and further before Ms Elsie Leung, it has been a major focus of the work of the Department to develop Hong Kong as an international legal services centre and, in particular, a prominent regional centre for arbitration and mediation, with a view to attaining an important status in Asia. No doubt the plan will facilitate the work of the DoJ in this area.

Since 1986, the offices of the DoJ have mainly been accommodated in the Queensway Government Offices (“QGO”). Over the years, due to work, manpower and operational requirements, the space provision in the QGO where our present office is located, has become inadequate. From 1986 onwards, a number of our offices and staff have been housed in premises in the vicinity of the QGO, including government properties and leased commercial buildings. The scattered offices and staff in different places mean huge inconvenience to the deployment of resources and communication within the Department.

Under the plan announced by the Administration earlier, we intend to relocate some of the offices of the DoJ to the Main and East Wings of the former CGO in early 2015. The Central and Western District Council supported the proposal. We have also consulted the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services and will submit the funding application to the LegCo Public Works Subcommittee and the Finance

Committee early next year for endorsement and approval respectively. Under the circumstances, we are of the view that relocating the remaining offices of the DoJ to the West Wing of the former CGO will enable the DoJ to re-organise its offices in a comprehensive manner, enhancing its operation and internal communication and optimising the use of resources as a whole.

According to the reuse plan of the West Wing, apart from usage as offices for the DoJ, some space will also be allocated to law-related NGOs for setting up their offices. Since 2008 or even earlier, different international legal organisations have set up their offices in Hong Kong one after another. Here I would also like to impart to you the information that the Hague Conference on Private International Law will officially declare on 13 December 2012 the establishment of its regional office in Hong Kong, its very first in Asia and its second, after the one in Latin America, outside The Hague. The decision of such international legal bodies to set up office in Hong Kong will not only greatly promote the rule of law in Hong Kong, but also represents a vote of confidence in the continued effective implementation of the rule of law in Hong Kong under the “One Country, Two Systems”. We will in due course further discuss with other government departments on the accommodation arrangement for the related organisations and other legal bodies in the West Wing.

Generally speaking, we believe that the plan has the following advantages:

Firstly, integrating all divisions of the DoJ in the former CGO headquarters, making it the Department’s office, will help enhance the department’s overall operational and service efficiency.

Secondly, given that Hong Kong’s major executive, legislative and judicial authorities are currently located in the Central and Admiralty area, the planned use of the Main, East and West Wings of former CGO as the headquarters of DoJ demonstrates the emphasis placed by the government on legal work and its respect for the rule of law.

Thirdly, we believe the provision of office space in the West Wing to law-related NGOs will enable the NGOs to develop their services, and also create a favourable environment to

attract more international legal, arbitration and mediation institutions of a comparable nature to set up their offices in Hong Kong. This will further enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong as a regional centre for legal services and a centre for international arbitration and mediation in the Asia- Pacific region.

Fourthly, offices of the DoJ currently accommodated in buildings in the vicinity of Admiralty, including government-owned and leased properties, can also be released for use by other government departments. In other words, we no longer have to pay rent for those premises, thus achieving rental savings.

Looking ahead, the DoJ will maintain close liaison with other relevant government departments and NGOs on the reuse plan of the West Wing and work out other detailed planning for its development. While maintaining the current condition of the building, we hope to make available more space for use in the West Wing.

Thank you.