

Speech by SJ at Law Society Pro Bono and Community Work Award Ceremony 2012 (English only)

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Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Rimsky Yuen, SC, at the Law Society Pro Bono and Community Work Award Ceremony 2012 today (December 7):

Chief Justice, President of the Law Society, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to join you at the Pro Bono and Community Work Award Ceremony this evening. May I start by expressing my warmest congratulations to all those who receive awards this year.

We always talk about the importance of the rule of law. It is equally important to remember that access to justice is an indispensable element of the rule of law. In every community, there is a less privileged group of people who deserves assistance when they face legal issues. As members of the legal profession, we not only owe a duty to serve our clients in the best way we can, but also a social duty to assist those who need help. The provision of pro bono and community services can mean immense benefit to those who require assistance, enhance the image of the legal profession as a whole, as well as make our community a better one.

Earlier this week, I had the opportunity of meeting the UK Bar Chairman and learnt about the latest state of play of pro bono service in the UK. According to him, pro bono service is getting more and more popular amongst the law firms in the UK, and many of them have their own social responsibility statements as well as introduce their pro bono services through their websites. They take the view, and I think rightly so, that such service provides valuable training opportunities for their younger members, and as a way to discharge their social responsibility. I certainly hope that the same encouraging trend will take root in Hong Kong, and

that pro bono service will get the support of even more members of the legal profession.

It is true that each of us, as an individual, may only be making a small contribution. However, when putting our efforts together, we can do a big service to the community.

On the part of the Government, the Home Affairs Bureau has launched a Recognition Scheme for Provision of Pro Bono Legal Services. Some 250 legal professionals have been awarded "Individuals' Award" and 31 law firms have been awarded "Companies' Award". The presentation ceremony will be held later this month. We hope this could complement with what the Law Society has been doing in encouraging legal professionals in Hong Kong to volunteer to provide more free legal services to the members of the public.

Looking ahead, I hope all the awardees can keep up your pro bono work and spread the message concerning the importance of such service, which I am sure would be much treasured by the community. Thank you.

Ends/Friday, December 7, 2012