

SJ's speech at opening ceremony of 57th Congress of the International Association of Lawyers (English only) (with photos)

Following is a speech delivered by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Rimsky Yuen, SC, at the opening ceremony of the 57th Congress of the International Association of Lawyers today (October 31):

Your Excellency the Chief Executive of the Macao SAR, Mr Chui; friends of UIA; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, thank you for giving me this valuable opportunity to meet and address such a distinguished gathering of the international legal community. It is indeed my great pleasure and honour to join you at the opening ceremony of this year's UIA Congress. The UIA, or International Association of Lawyers, is certainly one of the most important international organisations of lawyers. This year's congress is the first to be held in the territory of China. This is a matter of significance and I extend my warmest congratulations to both the UIA and the Macao SAR.

Asia's economic performance has been remarkable in the past decade. Many Asian cities have become favourite destinations for commercial activities, with China ranked as the top choice. A natural consequence of this phenomenon is the ever increasing demand for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asian region. It is therefore even more important now than before to have information sharing and exchange of experience amongst the legal communities of the Asian jurisdictions and the rest of the world. The UIA Congress is an important platform for such exchange and cross-fertilisation.

Over the years, Hong Kong and Macau have taken on a unique role in connecting the East and the West. The two cities used to be colonies, but are now each a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems". Macau continues with her continental legal system, whilst Hong Kong remains and is the only common law jurisdiction within the Greater China region.

I have no doubt that Hong Kong and Macau have plenty of room for long-term co-operation in the legal context and beyond. Apart from international arbitration which I shall mention later, the two places have joined hands in projects which are of interest to the international legal community. For instance, the Asia Pacific Regional Office of the Hague Conference on Private

International Law, which was set up in Hong Kong in December last year, organised, jointly with the Governments of Hong Kong and Macau, a very successful workshop in Macau this March on the 1993 Hague Inter-country Adoption Convention.

As the Secretary for Justice of Hong Kong, I do not think I can resist the temptation to make use of this valuable opportunity to market our steadfast policy to enhance the status of Hong Kong as the centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region.

Apart from being an international financial and commercial centre, Hong Kong provides a friendly environment for the international legal community. This explains the presence of so many international law firms and registered foreign lawyers in Hong Kong, which enables us to meet the needs of the international business community.

Hong Kong places great importance in the provision of dispute resolution services, with special emphasis in international arbitration and mediation. Our current Arbitration Ordinance is based on the well-known UNCITRAL Model Law. Our independent Judiciary is highly pro-arbitration. We have the presence in Hong Kong of leading arbitration institutes and bodies, such as the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre, the Asia Secretariat of the ICC International Court of Arbitration and the CIETAC Hong Kong Arbitration Center. Our enforcement network is extensive. Arbitral awards made in Hong Kong are enforceable in over 140 jurisdictions under the New York Convention. In this regard, may I reiterate our gratitude to the Macau Government in respect of the conclusion of the Arrangement Concerning Reciprocal Recognition and Enforcement of Arbitral Awards with Hong Kong in January this year, which arrangement will become effective before the end of this year.

As regards mediation, our new Mediation Ordinance came into force this January. Further, in addition to the Hong Kong Mediation Accreditation Association which looks after matters relating to the accreditation of mediators, we have the Steering Committee on Mediation to oversee the development of mediation in Hong Kong.

Put shortly, apart from being a springboard to Mainland China and the rest of Asia, Hong Kong has the necessary hardware and software to provide top-quality international legal and dispute resolution services. If our friends from the UIA are interested to know more, the Hong Kong Department of Justice is more than happy to assist.

Coming back to the UIA, I am very delighted to note Hong Kong's enhanced interaction with the association in recent years. I sincerely look forward to fostering closer ties between Hong Kong and the UIA in the years to come.

On this note, I wish all participants of the congress a joyful stay in Macau. I would also strongly recommend the participants to join the trip to Hong Kong scheduled for next Monday, so as to experience its vibrant and cosmopolitan character. Last but certainly not least, I also wish the UIA Congress another year of great success.

Thank you very much.

Ends/Thursday, October 31, 2013

