

SJ's speech at APCCA opening ceremony

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Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Ms Elsie Leung, at the opening ceremony of the 23rd Asian and Pacific Conference of Correctional Administrators (APCCA) this morning (December 8):

Secretary for Security Mr Ambrose Lee, Commissioner Mr Kelvin Pang, Director General of Directorate General of Corrections, Indonesia, Mr Adi Sujatno, Dr Neil Morgan and Mrs Morgan, distinguished delegates and guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to have been invited to officiate at the opening ceremony of the 23rd Asian and Pacific Conference of Correctional Administrators. This is the third time this conference has been held in Hong Kong and the first time since the reunification with China in 1997. Some 25 jurisdictions are represented here today, and I have no doubt that all of those attending will benefit enormously from the sessions and the exchanges. I warmly welcome all the delegates on behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Hong Kong's Correctional Services Department enjoys a fine reputation at the international level, and one that is richly deserved. The Department has, in many areas, pioneered the latest techniques in the treatment of offenders, and the range of its facilities is considerable. It is well able to cope with the needs of particular offenders, no matter how demanding these may be in physical, linguistic, dietary or other areas.

The contribution the department makes to our criminal justice system is profound. It advises courts on the viability of various sentencing options. It provides a host of programmes to those committed to its care. After-care services of the highest quality are arranged in order to facilitate the successful reintegration into society of those who have paid their debt to society. The staff of the department are all highly trained and forward looking, and keen to tap into the latest thinking at the international level.

The Correctional Services Department is firmly wedded to the notion that wherever possible punishment should be combined with rehabilitation. Progressive

modes of dealing with those sentenced by the courts are deployed to the extent that this is feasible and in the interests of the community and the offender. During your visit I hope you will have the opportunity to see something of the operation not only of our traditional prisons, but also of those dedicated institutions which place the emphasis of their programmes upon the particular needs of individual offenders.

The ways in which training centres, drug addiction treatment centres, detention centres, reformatory schools and rehabilitation centres operate all reflect the importance which we in Hong Kong attach to the reform of offenders, particularly those who are young and who can more easily be pointed in the proper direction for the future. It cannot be right to regard the rehabilitation of the young offender as a consideration distinct from the protection of the public. The two things are intrinsically linked. The criminal justice system must aim to rehabilitate young offenders in particular, not least because reformation of that type removes the danger to the public from those who are not yet hardened in criminal ways.

The debate over whether punishment or rehabilitation best serves the interests of the community is as old as the criminal justice system itself. Prison systems must surely seek to ensure that those who pass through are better persons when they leave than when they enter, and are thus less of a threat to society. Hong Kong is fortunate to have in place a penal system which keeps inmates gainfully occupied, and which seeks thereby to develop responsibility, teamwork and, perhaps most importantly, confidence. Most inmates in due course will face the challenge of reintegration into society, and if that is to be successful they must be properly prepared.

These are important concepts, and not all agree on the best way forward. Different societies may have different needs. The APCCA has for over 20 years provided those concerned with the treatment of offenders in the Asia and Pacific Region with a valuable forum in which to exchange ideas and experiences, and to identify the most effective strategies for the future. As each of you apply your various perspectives to the issues under consideration this week, you will, I know, be interested to learn more of the way in which the penal system of Hong Kong has evolved in a constructive and enlightened way in recent times.

I wish you all a successful conference. I hope as well that you have the time to see something of Hong Kong and to learn more of our role as Asia's World City. It is with pleasure that I now declare this conference open.

Ends/Monday, December 8, 2003