

Statement by former SJ

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Following is the statement (in translation) by the former Secretary for Justice, Ms Elsie Leung, on the personnel arrangements for the post of the Secretary for Justice today (October 20) at the media session:

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am most grateful to the Chief Executive for his very kind remarks - I really do not deserve them. I am glad that at long last I may speak to you on my resignation as the Secretary for Justice now that the Central People's Government has agreed to relieve me of my duties as a Principal Official.

The work of the Secretary for Justice is onerous: not only has he or she to supervise prosecutions, law drafting, civil litigation, legal policy and international law divisions and in providing advice to government bureaus and departments, but he or she must also share the work at the centre of the Government, in particular work on legal problems. Previously, Attorneys-General would serve until 55 or 60 years of age. Now that I am 66 and the demands placed on my job are ever-increasing, it would be irresponsible if I struggled to continue my service with no confidence of efficiency.

Furthermore, of the five Law Officers of the Department, three of them are due to retire in the year 2007/08. If I wait until the end of the second-term government, the operation of the department might be affected by too many changes in personnel at a high level within a short span of time.

Because of this, I tendered my resignation last year to the then Chief Executive. Since the Government was looking for a suitable replacement, I have remained in my post. With the passage of time, the matter can no longer wait. It is fortunate that the Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang, understands my situation and has been able to find someone willing to be appointed in the person of Mr Wong Yan-lung, SC, whose appointment has been approved by the Central People's Government and a release and appointment decree was made this morning.

Mr Wong has a distinguished academic record and curriculum vitae. He has been instructed by the department in numerous cases which he handled with great expertise.

My departmental colleagues and I have much respect for him. I also appreciate his integrity, his vision and his commitment to Hong Kong. I have confidence that he will meet the challenges of the post of the Secretary for Justice and command the respect and co-operation of colleagues in the department. I take this opportunity to wish him every success in his new post, and in leading the department forward in great strides.

Under the leadership of the former Chief Secretary, I participated in the work of the Constitutional Development Task Force. Yesterday, Report No. 5 on Constitutional Development was published. In order to ensure a smooth transition, I am willing to remain as a member of the task force, and to follow the leadership of the Chief Secretary, so the work of the task force can continue. This work will not affect the power of the new Secretary for Justice: first, during this period, I will give no legal advice to the Government on any work falling outside the remit of the task force. Secondly, the Department of Justice, including the Secretary for Justice, may provide legal advice to the Government on constitutional development and is indeed responsible for providing such advice. There is no question of someone's advice being overridden by another's.

Time flies. Over the eight to nine years since I joined the Government, colleagues of my department have given me tremendous support. During the early days of the establishment of the HKSAR, there were many legal challenges never met before. Because of their diligence, efficacy, courage and their commitment to the reunification of Hong Kong with our motherland, and the concept of 'One Country, Two Systems', they have risen to those challenges with flying colours. For this, I shall be grateful to them forever. I must also thank the first-term Chief Executive Mr Tung Chee-hwa, and the current Chief Executive Mr Tsang for their confidence in me. They have given me the chance to serve Hong Kong at a historic period. I must also thank my colleagues, the other Principal Officials and friends inside and outside the Government, including some I have never met face to face. They have given me unfailing support and encouragement at a time when I needed it most. The past eight to nine years are the most memorable in my life; it was my greatest honour to have been able to serve the people of Hong Kong. I wish you all economic success, smooth operation of government, harmony in the community, peace and happiness for the people and progress on all fronts of society.

Thank you.

Ends/Thursday, October 20, 2005

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