

Speech by Secretary for Justice at signing ceremony of HK/Finland Mutual Legal Assistant Agreement in Helsinki (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Wong Yan Lung, SC, at the Signing Ceremony of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region/Finland Mutual Legal Assistant Agreement in Helsinki, Finland today (October 4, Helsinki time):

Honourable Minister Brax, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be in Helsinki today to represent the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to sign the Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters with Ms Tuija Brax, Minister of Justice of Finland.

Globalisation and technological advancements have facilitated easier and faster flow of people, goods and information across national boundaries. While we are enjoying the advantages and convenience of these developments, criminals are abusing them in committing transnational crimes. To combat these criminal activities, international cooperation in judicial assistance is very important in weaving concerted efforts among jurisdictions for bringing criminals to justice. In this regard, Hong Kong has been sparing no effort in strengthening its international law enforcement capability by expanding its network of bilateral arrangements with foreign jurisdictions concerning mutual legal assistance in criminal matters.

The Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Agreement signed today is the twenty-second of this kind that Hong Kong has entered into with foreign jurisdictions. We are most pleased to conclude this Agreement soon after our conclusion of the Surrender of Fugitive Offenders Agreement which was in May 2005.

We look forward to early entry into force of these Agreements. With the implementation of the two Agreements, we will have a closer and more effective cooperation with Finland in these areas in the future. We hope that this cooperation also demonstrates to our other European negotiating partners that Hong Kong is committed to partnering with them in bringing fugitives to justice and facilitating mutual legal assistance.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to colleagues of both sides who have taken part in the negotiation process of the Agreement. I understand that this Agreement was negotiated between the two sides solely by exchange of electronic mail, and two sides only met for the initialing of the agreed text. So our thanks should also go to modern communication too without which the successful conclusion of the Agreement would not have been achieved so quickly.

Thank you.

Ends/Thursday, October 4, 2007