Speech by Mr Wong Yan Lung, SC
Secretary for Justice
at Operation Santa Claus Closing Ceremony
on 20th January 2011

Bryan, Selina, Franklin, Ms Kuok, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and great friends here,

It is my truly pleasure to join you at the Closing Ceremony of Operation Santa Claus, and to extend my sincere congratulations for yet another successful year of fundraising to RTHK and the South China Morning Post. I understand that you have set for yourself a very modest target of $12 million. Like everyone here. I look forward with excitement to the announcement of the final amount raised.

2. To most people, Santa Claus reminds us of Christmas presents, the pleasure of both receiving and giving them. Particularly on cold days like these, the very thought of Santa Claus coming to town and giving away gifts is truly heart-warming.

3.   There are two things that Operation Santa Claus reminds me of.

4.   First, it is "operation". It means action, not just talk. It means planned activities involving different people, not just a lone campaigner. In the early 90's I was a volunteer working among the homeless people in Yau Ta Mei and Jordan area in Kowloon. At that time a charity that motivated me to do this work also bears the name "operation". It helped children with facial deformity. I remember watching an interview with a volunteer doctor on TV. She said, "Every year I said I was not coming back again. I was so tired, like some of you who have worked through Christmas. Yet, every year I came back." Then with tears in her eyes, she continued, "I am doing the work until I cannot move." May that be the spirit here as well. What compelled her to continue was the fact that her efforts transformed lives.

5.   Likewise, Operation Santa Claus transforms lives. I read how the chosen beneficiaries this year, the 16 NGOs and social enterprises, are transforming the lives of many: the lives of the impoverished children in the Mainland whose parents died of

AIDS; the lives of the youngsters with crippling diseases or physical deformities that prevent them from enjoying a normal childhood; and the lives of many more who, through physical disabilities or speech problems, are unable to properly communicate with their friends, families and teachers. Your labour and the gifts of Operation Santa Claus have enabled them to go a long way.

6.   The second thing Operation Santa Claus reminds me of is a book about "Santa Claus" which I read with my daughters last year. It was called "Miracle on 34th Street" by Valentine Davies. It was about an old man who works a special magic at Macy's flagship store on 34th Street New York. As Macy's very unconventional store Santa, this man single-handedly sparks a new spirit of giving throughout the city: giving out help and assistance, putting others' happiness and well-being first, making sacrifices, and yet eventually benefiting from such sacrifices and goodwill. This Santa Claus restores the Christmas spirit for bustling New York City.

7.　　　　This story appealed to me as a lawyer, as it involves a trial where a lawyer set out to prove legally that the old man was indeed Santa Claus. Eventually, you would be pleased to learn that mercy triumphs over judgment.

8.　　　　As a lawyer and Secretary for Justice, I am the protector of all charities under common law. I can and will do my best to protect charities in law, but I cannot give the charities the power and ability they need to achieve their goals. You can.

9.　　　　Santa Claus should be very grateful to you: for you help transform him from an icon of commercialism to a symbol of love, generosity and goodwill. Hong Kong should be grateful to you: for as in New York City, "underneath all the hurry and bustle people still believe in Santa Claus." You have fulfilled that belief and expectation and have also helped restored the Christmas spirit here.

10.　　　　Thank you. I wish all of you, particularly those who have helped in this Operation in money, in time, in ideas and in efforts, a very Happy New Year. May the Lord bless you all.