

SJ's speech at opening ceremony of Asia Pacific Regional Office of Hague  
Conference on Private International Law

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Below is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Rimsky Yuen,  
SC, at the opening ceremony of the Asia Pacific Regional Office of the  
Hague Conference on Private International Law today (December 13):

Chief Executive Mr Leung, Vice Minister Cui, Secretary General Mr van Loon,  
your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Message of Welcome

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It is my great privilege and pleasure to welcome you to the opening  
ceremony of the Asia Pacific Regional Office of the Hague Conference on  
Private International Law.

We are very honoured to have around 100 participants including  
consuls general, honorary consuls from the Member States of the Hague  
Conference and from the States in the Asia Pacific region, as well as  
prominent lawyers, legal academics and representatives of international  
organisations from around the region.

Your presence today highlights the importance of the Regional Office,  
which aims to promote and strengthen international co-operation through  
the various Conventions of the Hague Conference. As globalisation  
continues, we enter into more and more complex commercial, personal and  
family relationships with people in other countries. Accordingly, the  
need for a common yardstick through private international law becomes  
greater and greater.

The Hague Conference

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For almost 120 years, the Hague Conference on Private International  
Law has been working steadfastly for the progressive harmonisation of  
private international law. Apart from initiating cross-border  
co-operation in legal procedure and litigation, the Hague Conference has

made huge contributions towards the welfare of families across international boundaries, in matters as diverse as recognition of marriage, protection of children in inter-country adoption and abduction cases as well as the conflict of laws relating to testamentary dispositions.

It is encouraging to learn from the Secretary General the successful work carried out by the Regional Office of the Hague Conference in Latin American in promoting acceptance and accession to Hague Conventions. The beneficial impacts of Hague Conventions are not limited to countries in a particular region. They may serve as a very sound basis for international co-operation in different parts of the world. Today, we witness the opening of the second regional office of the Hague Conference, which will serve the Asia-Pacific region.

The Hague Conventions are, of course, readily available to both Member States and non-Member States of the Hague Conference alike. A State may take advantage of the existing Conventions by simply becoming a party to the Conventions. This is a quick and efficient means of achieving international co-operation and has the advantage of saving time and resources required in negotiating bilateral agreements to cover the same subject matter.

The Hague Conventions stand out as shining examples of a pool of international instruments, in the field of private international law on various different subject matters, which may be conveniently tapped into by any State in the region. Many of these instruments have been tested by time and actual cases, and we can testify that they have served Hong Kong very well over the years.

#### Hong Kong and Hague Conference

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It has all along been the Government's policy to stay international and to be part of the global legal network. Since 1998, representatives from Hong Kong have been participating actively in meetings of the Hague Conference as part of the Chinese delegation. This is made possible by the relevant provisions in the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special

Administrative Region (HKSAR).

In 2008, Hong Kong was privileged to host the Third Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the Hague Conference. Since then, with strong support from the Central Government and in consultation with other Member States, we explored with the Permanent Bureau the possibility of strengthening the presence of the Hague Conference in the region.

In 2012, our collaboration with the Hague Conference on regional initiatives reached new heights when the Council on General Affairs and Policy endorsed the proposal to establish the Asia Pacific Regional Office in Hong Kong. This not only marked a new chapter for the Hague Conference but also constituted a significant vote of confidence in Hong Kong's position both as a regional legal services centre and as a springboard for the Hague Conference to further develop its work and extend its influence in the region. I am confident that the Regional Office will play a crucial role in promoting awareness of the Hague Conventions and encouraging States in the region to sign up for more Hague Conventions. It will also support the provision of training and technical assistance to States in the region for the effective implementation of the Hague Conventions.

Vote of thanks

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Ladies and Gentlemen, we are most grateful for the support that we have received for the establishment of the Regional Office in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. In this regard, may I first of all thank the Hague Conference for its vote of confidence in the HKSAR including its legal system and infrastructure by establishing its Asia Pacific Regional Office here. I would also like to thank your interest and support in making the establishment of the Regional Office a reality. The HKSAR Government will do its best to facilitate the work of the Regional Office so that it will serve the Member States of the Hague Conference and the interested States in the region.

I would also like to express our gratitude to the Central Government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the strong support and

assistance it has provided throughout the process. My thanks also go to Mr Michael Hartmann for his acceptance of the appointment as the first Representative of the Regional Office. The assistance offered by Invest Hong Kong in the setting up of the office is also appreciated.

Last but not least, my vote of thanks would not be complete without mentioning my predecessor, Mr Wong Yan Lung, SC, who worked very hard to overcome hurdles and make things happen. I am most grateful to Mr Wong for the significant contributions he has made, and am glad that he can join us today in the opening ceremony to witness the fruit of his efforts over the past few years.

Concluding remarks

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Ladies and gentlemen, this opening ceremony marks the beginning of the Regional Office, and I look forward to your continuous support to the Regional Office in its future operation. I am confident that with your participation in the activities of the Regional Office in the years ahead, the bond, effectiveness and influence of the Hague Conventions in the Asia Pacific region will go from strength to strength.

May I wish the Regional Office every success and that those of you coming to Hong Kong for this ceremony have an enjoyable and memorable stay.

Ends/Thursday, December 13, 2012