

**Speech of Ms Teresa Cheng, SC
Secretary for Justice
The 2019 Law Society Pro Bono and Community
Service Award Presentation Ceremony
19 December 2019 (Thursday)**

Chief Justice (Mr Geoffrey Ma Tao-li), **Melissa** (President of the Law Society of Hong Kong, Ms Melissa Pang), **distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

Good morning. It is my pleasure to be here on the tenth anniversary of the Law Society Pro Bono and Community Service Award Presentation Ceremony. I would like to congratulate the Law Society and all those involved on the success of this meaningful Award.

Distinctive role of the legal profession in the society

2. Hong Kong has prided itself for her strong rule of law tradition. “Rule of Law” however would simply be an empty slogan if not properly understood, widely practised

and duly respected. It is through our daily lives and activities that we become testament to the existence of the rule of law. All of us jointly bear the responsibility to respect, promote and further the rule of law as a fundamental basis of our society.

3. The concept of “Corporate Social Responsibility” is not new and indeed has been advocated for years by different companies recognising their social accountability to the community. Pro bono service is a manifestation of such responsibility at the individual level.

4. The essence of pro bono legal services is not just about quantity; their quality is also equally important. As key players in the legal system, professional lawyers like your good selves have shouldered onerous obligations to promote to the community-at-large a proper and unbiased understanding of the law.

Facilitating access to justice

5. Hong Kong residents' rights to access to the courts, choice of lawyers for timely protection of their lawful rights and interests or for representation in the courts are specifically provided for under Article 35 of our Basic Law. In this regard, legal aid is an integral part of Hong Kong's well-trusted legal system, with our policy objective to ensure that no one with reasonable grounds for pursuing or defending a legal action is denied access to justice because of a lack of means.

6. Hong Kong has well established and funded legal aid schemes administered by the Legal Aid Department. The fact that there is no ceiling on the annual expenditure on legal aid services, which is demand-led and always subject to supplementary provision if needed, manifests

the Government's steadfast commitment in facilitating access to justice. In the 2019-20 financial year, the estimated expenditure for legal aid services is around \$1.59 billion, representing almost a double of that of the previous year.

7. Nonetheless, the Government's efforts alone are not sufficient to fill the gaps of growing needs in our complex and fast-evolving society in Hong Kong where rule of law is dearly cherished. This is where pro bono legal services step in, with the substantive efforts and contributions of the two branches of the legal profession.

Need of proliferation of pro bono culture in Hong Kong

8. As I mentioned earlier, with more awareness of the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility, law firms in Hong Kong have in recent years devoted commendable

efforts in organising and structuring relevant schemes for their employees, including trainees, to participate in the provision of pro bono legal services. An inclusive pro bono community is being nurtured as can be seen from the diversity in age, gender and cultural background of the pro bono lawyers here. This is a most encouraging phenomenon.

Closing

9. In closing, I have to register my vote of thanks to the Law Society for the continuous effort in promoting pro bono and community work in the past years. I would like to congratulate and commend all our awardees today for your dedication, professionalism and selflessness to bring about social good. All of you have proudly set a role model for the industry to serve the community. I would appeal to you for your further efforts in promoting the pro

bono culture among your peers, within your firms and in the professional community. I count on the partnership of the Government and everyone here today to spread the pro bono culture and instil a strong legal culture in Hong Kong, thereby reinforcing the rule of law that has long sustained the success of our home.

10. As Christmas is around the time, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very merry and peaceful Christmas and a prosperous and happy new year. Thank you very much.