

Speech by SJ at virtual signing ceremony of memorandum of understanding on secondment of legal professionals (English only)

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Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC, at the Virtual Signing Ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Hague Conference on Private International Law and the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China for the Technical and Administrative Arrangements relating to the Secondment of Legal Professionals today (December 22):

Dr Bernasconi (Secretary General of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, Dr Christophe Bernasconi), ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure today to participate in the virtual signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Hague Conference on Private International Law and the Department of Justice of the Government of the HKSAR.

Over the years, the Hague Conference and the Department of Justice have been collaborating closely on various projects and events. We are very delighted that the Hague Conference's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in the HKSAR has recently moved into the former French Mission Building, which forms an important part of the Hong Kong Legal Hub. This historical building is where I am standing right now. The signing of this Memorandum marks yet another milestone for the long-standing partnership between the Hague Conference and the Department of Justice.

As I have mentioned on various occasions, it is Department's policy initiative to nurture Hong Kong's legal talent through continuous provision of training opportunities including secondment arrangements with international organisations. Through participating in the work of such organisations, our legal talent will expand their knowledge of the operation of international organisations, broaden their horizons through learning from international law experts, and inject a Hong Kong perspective in shaping the development of international law.

I am very pleased to announce that under the secondment arrangement with the Hague Conference, lawyers in both public and private sectors will have opportunities to gain experience at the Hague Conference. The Hague Conference is a highly respected inter-governmental organisation that develops multilateral instruments in

response to global needs in the area of private international law. I am deeply grateful for the Hague Conference's kind support to this secondment scheme and the invaluable opportunities that it will offer to our legal talent. I have no doubt that the strong bonding between the Hague Conference and the Department of Justice will continue to create synergies for both parties, and importantly, for the furtherance and development of the private international law.

The COVID-19 pandemic explains why the ceremony today is held virtually. Thanks to the technological advancement, the dedicated support of eBRAM and the commitments of both the Hague Conference and Department of Justice, we are able to make use of lawtech to tackle the social-distancing limitations posed by the pandemic. In particular, our technical partner, eBRAM, provides us with the technical support in hosting this signing ceremony by leveraging its online platform, which turns digital signing of the Memorandum into a practical reality. This showcases one of the many facets of Hong Kong's strengths in the areas of innovation, information and communication technology as an innovation hub.

Indeed, the benefits brought about by lawtech are palpable and remarkable during times of the pandemic. As part of the Government's anti-epidemic initiatives, a COVID-19 ODR Scheme has been established and the eBRAM Centre has been commissioned to provide online ODR and deal-making platforms. The Scheme provides parties with an option to resolve global and local COVID-19 related disputes in a speedy and cost-effective manner. The video conferencing technology of eBRAM specifically developed for ODR enables parties to sign an "electronic ODR agreement" and conduct negotiation and mediation meetings as well as arbitration hearings online in a secure and effective environment.

Whilst COVID-19 may be here to linger, it will be important that the research, study and discussion on private international law continue as we adapt to the new normal. The Hague Conference, as the leading body in this area, has a pivotal role to play and with its regional office here in Hong Kong, we look forward to collaborate in this particular area.

The Department of Justice will invite applications for this secondment scheme in the first quarter of 2021 and hope that both government lawyers and the legal profession in the private sector will benefit from this unique opportunity.

Finally, let me wish you all a very merry and also quiet Christmas, and a very

happy and healthy 2021. And Christophe, may I say I hope to see you in person real soon. Thank you very much.

Ends/Tuesday, December 22, 2020