

**Welcome Remarks of Ms. Teresa Cheng, SC
Secretary for Justice**

**First iGLIP on ODR Meeting
18 March 2021 (Thursday)**

Anna, colleagues from UNCITRAL both in Vienna and in Incheon, distinguished experts,

1. Good day to you all. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the first meeting of the Inclusive Global Legal Innovation Platform for Online Dispute Resolution (“iGLIP on ODR”). My sincere thanks to each and every one of you for giving your precious time and expertise to embark on this ambitious project.

2. Technology is developing at a breathtaking pace, and the world has seen greater technological development, innovation and adaptation in all facets of society. The legal industry is no exception. The resulting increased interconnectedness of the world, the substantial growth of cross-border trade, and the volume of international disputes that ensue calls for a need to

review the legal framework – be they in the form of laws, regulations, or soft law, so as to keep up with the dynamic advancements in technology.

3. The outbreak of the global pandemic has emphasised the need to focus our efforts on LawTech and online dispute resolution (“ODR”). The pandemic has caused significant disruptions to the international supply chain and the loss of business due to social distancing and other anti-epidemic measures. If cash flow issues arise in businesses, especially in micro, small and medium enterprises (“MSMEs”), their survival may be endangered. When face-to-face dispute resolution has been rendered ineffective or perhaps even impossible under the pandemic, there is a pressing need for businesses, MSMEs especially, to have their disputes resolved in a time-efficient and cost-effective manner. This is one of the areas where ODR has flourished: overcoming geographical barriers and saving time and hence costs, and, in fact, also as a positive contributor to climate change by reducing the carbon emissions caused by flights.

4. In light of the challenges and opportunities presented by LawTech and ODR, the iGLIP on ODR was set up to survey the ODR landscape, keep track of and study emerging technologies and how they influence and affect the ODR process, conduct in-depth analyses on potential issues that may arise, and explore, discuss and develop innovative legal tools to address such issues. With the benefit of drawing from the expertise and experience of experts such as yourselves, it is hoped that the iGLIP on ODR will be able to effectively contribute to the legal sector's response to the use of LawTech and in particular ODR. We are much encouraged to collaborate with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law ("UNCITRAL") on this very important project, and of course with the support from experts gathered online here today.

5. The iGLIP logo reflects our vision for this collaboration. The hexagonal shape of the logo is commonly found in nature due to its efficiency, effectiveness and strength, and represents our

vision for the iGLIP project to grow, starting with discussions on ODR, and expanding to other areas of LawTech that should be explored. The colours of the iGLIP logo draws from those of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and reflects our vision to act in collaborative partnership for people, planet, and prosperity as a response to the Agenda.

6. This ambitious work of the DOJ Project Office for Collaboration with UNCITRAL (“DOJ Project Office”) and the iGLIP on ODR is also in line with the Hong Kong Government’s objectives in this area. The Hong Kong Government is aware of the development and impact of the use of technology and law, and in particular of the emergence of ODR. Back in 2018, the Chief Executive in her Policy Address outlined the development of LawTech. In my speech at the 2019 Ceremonial Opening of the Legal Year, I emphasised the importance of making use of technology in providing legal services, citing the United Nations General Assembly in 2016 in observing that ODR “can assist the parties in resolving the dispute in a simple, fast, flexible, and

secure manner, without the need for physical presence at a meeting or hearing”.

7. Earlier this year, the Department of Justice announced the development of the Hong Kong Legal Cloud to enhance the capability of the legal profession to harness modern technology in the provision of legal and dispute resolution services. The Hong Kong Legal Cloud shall be an advanced and user-friendly facility situated in Hong Kong to provide a secure, reliable and affordable data storage solution for the local legal and dispute resolution sector, with a view to keeping pace with global changes and manifesting Hong Kong’s capacity in the area of LawTech.

8. I am pleased to say that the Department of Justice has always had a very close working relationship with UNCITRAL. I still vividly remember the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with Anna at the Asia Pacific Judicial Summit in November 2019, which strengthens our collaboration in the field of international trade law and dispute resolution. Indeed, it is

pursuant to this MOU that the DOJ Project Office has been established, and will provide secretarial support to the iGLIP on ODR.

9. UNCITRAL and the Department of Justice both share the aim of strengthening collaboration in the field of international trade law and to promote the use of arbitration and other forms of dispute resolution to resolve disputes in international trade, commerce and investment. From holding conferences and promotional and training events such as the Judicial Summit to seconding counsel of the Department of Justice to the UNCITRAL Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific to act as legal experts, our relationship has been as close as ever.

10. We have also had the pleasure, with the support from the Central People's Government, of participating in the Working Groups of UNCITRAL. In particular, we have had the privilege of hosting the pre-intersessional meeting of UNCITRAL's Working Group III here in Hong Kong last year, and we will also

be hosting the upcoming WGIII intersessional meeting scheduled to be held in Hong Kong later this year. These two sessions are the first to be held in Hong Kong, and it is this close collaboration between the Department of Justice and UNCITRAL that has made this possible.

11. To conclude, while the pandemic has restricted our ability to meet in person, we are also beneficiaries of technology which has allowed us to continue this most important work on LawTech and ODR. I hope to personally welcome you all to Hong Kong once the pandemic subsides. I also look forward to the engaging and insightful discussions to follow, both today and in the future, and hope you will also benefit from your membership of the iGLIP on ODR in the exchange of ideas with colleagues from around the world and in knowing that you are a part of this meaningful project. Thank you very much.