

Speech by SJ at Webinar on Hong Kong Legal Cloud (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC, at the Webinar on Hong Kong Legal Cloud today (April 1):

Melissa (President of the Law Society of Hong Kong, Ms Melissa Pang), Amirali (Vice-President of the Law Society of Hong Kong, Mr Amirali Nasir), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to thank the Law Society for co-organising this timely event, which provides a platform to introduce the latest LawTech initiative of the Hong Kong Government - the Hong Kong Legal Cloud, and to gather thoughts on how the facility can be developed to suit the needs of our legal and dispute resolution communities.

As I have highlighted on various occasions, since 2018, the Government has accorded high priority to the development of LawTech in providing quality legal and dispute resolution services in Hong Kong and the region. Riding on the success of the LawTech Fund and the COVID-19 ODR (Online Dispute Resolution) Scheme last year, as recently announced in the Policy Address 2020 and stressed in the 2021-22 Budget, the Department of Justice (DoJ) is tasked to explore the development of the Hong Kong Legal Cloud to enhance the capability of our legal and dispute resolution community to harness modern technology in providing services.

Since its outbreak, we have witnessed how the pandemic has created challenges on the provision of legal and dispute resolution services. Traditionally, hearings have to be conducted in person and documentation tends to be retained in hard-copy format. As practitioners, you would no doubt see the need that the voluminous documents, hearing bundles and reference materials have to be stored and handled systematically and efficiently. The pandemic has brought this need to the forefront. Representatives from the Law Society and various professional bodies have reached out today to share experiences of the challenges that they have faced and we hope to hear some constructive comments on the way forward utilising technology as a tool to facilitate the provision of legal and dispute resolution services in Hong Kong.

The DoJ is strongly committed to pursuing the development of the Hong Kong Legal Cloud. The DoJ has recently announced that a sum of around HK\$15.7 million,

being the Hong Kong Legal Cloud Fund, will be provided for such development by selected non-profit-making NGOs through public-private partnership. The facility aims to provide secured, quick and affordable storage of and access to files and information for the entire legal and dispute resolution profession, including mediators and arbitrators in Hong Kong.

I am delighted to know that this webinar has attracted a great mix of professionals with specialties in litigation, commercial/corporate law, maritime law, mediation, arbitration, ODR and IT. With better knowledge and understanding about the legal and dispute resolution sectors' expectations and needs, together with valuable insights from the technical and IT perspective, potential service providers would be more and better equipped to provide the services that could best serve the industry's needs.

The Hong Kong Legal Cloud, together with the LawTech Fund and the COVID-19 ODR Scheme, will not be the final stop of Hong Kong's LawTech development. Instead, they will chart the path for more proactive, vibrant and up-to-date LawTech development and wider use of electronic legal services in Hong Kong, thereby contributing to solidifying Hong Kong's status as a regional hub for legal and dispute resolution services.

For instance, the Inclusive Global Legal Innovation Platform on ODR (iGLIP on ODR), which was set up and supported by the DOJ Project Office for Collaboration with UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) to discuss various international developments on ODR, met for the first time on March 18. At the meeting, experts from Oceania, Europe, Africa, Americas and Asia exchanged views and discussed international developments of various online platforms with a view to identifying areas for future work in collaboration with UNCITRAL. We hope that our efforts through iGLIP on ODR could contribute to the international development and usage of LawTech.

Last but not the least, I appeal to your continuous support in our LawTech initiatives and active subscription to the Hong Kong Legal Cloud service upon its launch in the near future. Thank you very much.

Ends/Thursday, April 1, 2021