

Speech by SJ at the National Day Reception of Thailand (English only)

Consul-General (Mr. Tull Traisorat), ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to join you all today. We gather here to celebrate not one, but three important occasions: (1) the Birthday of the late King Rama the IX, (2) the National Day of Thailand, and (3) Thailand's Father's Day which all fall on the same special day, December 5th. On behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, may I extend to you, Consul-General, and the people of Thailand, our warmest congratulations.

2. Thailand has undergone transformation in the recent decades amid rapid economic growth amongst other developments to achieve the present heights in the region and across the world. It is the second largest economy in ASEAN¹. The hospitality and vibrance of Thailand and its people, and the delicious food, have made the country an addictive attraction to international tourists including us from Hong Kong.

¹ Association of Southeast Asian Nation.

Close ties between Thailand and Hong Kong

3. Today, Hong Kong and Thailand enjoy robust and long-standing relations in different aspects that continue to thrive despite the pandemic. With the opening of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Bangkok two years ago, the bilateral connection between the two places continues to expand and excel on all fronts.

4. Business wise, Thailand is Hong Kong's tenth largest merchandise trading partner and one of the closest partners among the ASEAN members. Our bilateral trade amounted to US\$17.4 billion last year and is expected to be on the rise.

5. With the eastward shift of global economic gravity, it is crucial to extend our partnership to regional fora including ASEAN and APEC to promote coordinated regional sustainable development. Hong Kong's Free Trade Agreement and Investment Agreement with ASEAN, which have recently come into full force, have further strengthened regional cooperation among countries including Thailand and China.

6. What's more, Hong Kong, as an international financial and trading hub occupying a strategic location in the Asia-Pacific region, plays an unrivalled role as the prime gateway to the massive Mainland China market. Around 13% of the total trade between Thailand and the Mainland was routed through Hong Kong last year. This underlines Hong Kong's irreplaceable role, under the unique "one country, two systems" policy, to act as a dynamic connector between the Mainland and the rest of the world to tap into the unlimited opportunities offered by the National 14th Five-Year Plan, the Development of the Greater Bay Area and the Qianhai Plan, and also the Belt and Road Initiative

Legal Cooperation

7. As the Secretary for Justice, I am proud to highlight Hong Kong's sound foundation of the rule of law and robust legal fraternity, with the benefit of which our city has a lot to offer to the Thai businesses as an ideal hub for deal-making and dispute resolution services.

8. Government-to-Government collaborations are vital to facilitate cross-jurisdiction exchanges and development of professional services. In November 2019, I signed with the Office of the Judiciary of the Kingdom of

Thailand a Memorandum of Cooperation, which marked an encouraging step in furthering legal cooperation between the two places.

9. At regional level, this week, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China had the privilege of hosting the 59th Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization ("AALCO") Annual Session. Securing such international organisations as AALCO to hold decision-making meetings in Hong Kong illustrates the city's capacity and strengthens our position as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region. I must also congratulate Dr. Kamaline Pinitpuvadol from the Kingdom of Thailand on having been elected and appointed as the next AALCO Secretary-General. Hong Kong is ready to contribute to our country in working with Thailand and other counterparts in Asia and Africa to jointly develop international law and promote international rule of law.

Development of LawTech & Online Dispute Resolution Service

10. At the AALCO Annual Session, a side event was conducted to discuss the Online Dispute Resolution ("ODR") around the world. In the Covid-19 era, a majority of physical exchanges have to go virtual. The growth in trade, especially through regional e-commerce, has inevitably led to more cross-border transactions and also disputes. In this regard, the Department of

Justice (“DoJ”) has been actively engaged in strengthening cooperation in the area of LawTech with international organisations and other jurisdictions.

11. For example at APEC² level, Hong Kong, China is committed to supporting APEC economies' sustainable growth and sharing experiences gained from working as a green finance and deal-making centre, including opting into the APEC ODR Framework in April 2020 to help global businesses, in particular Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, resolve business-to-business cross-boundary disputes focusing on low-value disputes.

12. Furthermore, to assist APEC economies to strengthen their economic and legal infrastructure, we, in March this year signed a Memorandum of Understanding with APEC to support the creation of the Strengthening Economic Legal Infrastructure sub-fund. The sub-fund under the APEC Economic Committee, currently chaired by the Commissioner of Inclusive Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Office of the Department of Justice, provides funding for capacity building work. I hope that all APEC economies can benefit from the sub-fund in their structural reform work.

² Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

13. Next year, Thailand is the host of the APEC Summit. The theme “Open. Connect. Balance.” clearly demonstrates Thailand’s commitment in developing the region towards an inclusive and sustainable growth, while driving APEC towards a sustainable and balanced post-COVID-19 era. I wish your country every success in organising this flagship annual event of APEC.

Thailand - the universal tourist destination

14. Many people in Hong Kong call Thailand another home of theirs. In the heart of Kowloon City is "Hong Kong's Little Thailand", always full of Hong Kong people looking for the most authentic Thai shopping and dining experience. Like me, we all miss Thailand a lot, a top tourist destination for global citizens who are drawn by the charms that your country can offer – the vibrant cities, blissful beaches and rich cultural heritage all complemented by warm Thai hospitality. The figures tell us all - for the past five years, an average of nearly 900 000 Hong Kong people have visited Thailand every year while over 500 000 Thai visitors have come to Hong Kong. There would certainly be much more if not the epidemic that has haunted us for almost two years. I myself am also longing for my next visit to Thailand very soon since my last one back in March 2019 when I called on the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Justice in Thailand.

Closing

15. Ladies and gentlemen, on this auspicious day, we gather here with the Thai community in Hong Kong to celebrate your National Day, your country's achievements and vibrance, as well as the deep-rooted bonds of friendship between Hong Kong and Thailand. I am sure that once the pandemic subsides and that cross-border travelling resumes, our people-to-people ties will continue to expand.

16. With the continuing support of all in Hong Kong including our friends in the Thai community, I am confident that we will together witness the continuing prosperity of this vibrant city and its growth to another height.

17. Finally, may I conclude by wishing you and your loved ones good health in this new normal. May I now propose a toast: "To the people of Thailand" Cheers.