

Speech by SJ at Law Society of Hong Kong's Pro Bono and Community Service Award Presentation Ceremony 2022 (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at the Law Society of Hong Kong's Pro Bono and Community Service Award Presentation Ceremony 2022 today (December 12):

Chief Justice (Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, Mr Andrew Cheung Kui-ning), President CM Chan (President of the Law Society of Hong Kong, Mr Chan Chak-ming), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good Afternoon. It is my pleasure to join you on this very meaningful occasion. May I first express my congratulations and gratitude to all the awardees, and the Law Society for your contributions to providing pro bono and community work.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and notably, the Law Society has added a Distinguished Achievement Award for promoting the "one country, two systems" concept, the Basic Law and the rule of law. This newly and timely introduced award echoes the message in President Xi's important speech delivered on July 1, 2022. He said, among other things, that the Central People's Government fully supports Hong Kong to preserve its common law system and that the principle of "one country, two systems" must be adhered to in the long run. He reassured us that the principle of "one country, two systems" and our common law system will continue to flourish.

Hong Kong's legal system, as the only common law jurisdiction in China, enjoys a long heritage and an excellent reputation in the global community. One of the underlying strengths of our legal system lies in the independence of the judiciary. Our courts exercise independent power of adjudication free from any interference, which is constitutionally guaranteed under the Basic Law.

There is no doubt that Hong Kong's legal system will continue to flourish and that Hong Kong will enhance its status as an international legal centre only if the rule of law is strengthened. The rule of law continues to be one of the most important bedrocks of Hong Kong's success. The rule of law upholds fairness, equality and justice, which are the core values in the administration of justice under our legal system. The rule of law should not be a mere slogan or an incomprehensible concept

to members of society. It could only be properly understood, implemented and manifested by day-to-day practice of all sectors in the community.

In this regard, the legal profession, as a major player of our legal system, has a vital and distinctive role to play. In addition to discharging your professional duties diligently and competently, your commitment to give back to society by performing pro bono legal services will certainly enhance access to justice, which is an important element of the rule of law. When some less privileged groups in the community need legal assistance but cannot afford to engage lawyers on their own, pro bono services fill the gap of these needs.

As announced in the Policy Address this year, "reinforcing the core value of the rule of law" is one of the Government's key priorities. In addition to steadfastly performing our roles and duties under the law, the Department of Justice will further promote the rule of law education in Hong Kong. To foster the concept of rule of law in society, the Department will establish a Steering Committee on Rule of Law Education and launch the "Rule of law Education Train-the-Trainers Programme" in 2023. These initiatives would not be effective without your strong support. I look forward to working closely with you and other stakeholders in strengthening the rule of law education for the general public, in particular our younger generation in Hong Kong.

In closing, I would like to thank all the awardees again for offering your precious time and professional knowledge to the less privileged in the community. You have set a very good example for the legal profession and indeed our community at large. Lastly, since this marks the 13th anniversary of the Law Society Pro Bono and Community Service Award Presentation Ceremony, I must also thank the Law Society for their continuous effort in promoting the pro bono culture.

As Christmas and New Year are approaching, may I also take this opportunity to wish you all a very joyful Christmas and a happy and healthy new year. Thank you very much.

Photo

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Ends/Monday, December 12, 2022