

**Speech by DSJ at National Day Reception of Ireland (English only) (with photo)**

Following is the speech by the Deputy Secretary for Justice, Mr Cheung Kwok-kwan, at the National Day Reception of Ireland today (March 14):

Minister Mr Eamon (*[ea-mon]*) RYAN (Minister for Environment, Climate, Communications and Transport, Republic of Ireland), Ambassador Ms Ann Derwin (Ambassador of Ireland to China and Mongolia), Consul General Mr David COSTELLO (*[cos-tell-lo]*) (Consul General of Ireland to HKSAR and MSAR), Deputy Commissioner Mr Pan Yundong (Deputy Commissioner of Office of Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. It is my great pleasure to join you, on this very special occasion, to celebrate the National Day of Ireland. On behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), may I extend to you, Minister Eamon, and the people of Ireland, our warmest congratulations.

In Hong Kong, a city renowned for its lively multiculturalism, St Patrick’s Day has been a celebration both loved and embraced by locals and its many Irish residents. What makes today’s celebration more remarkable, is that St Patrick’s Day will mark “100 Years of Ireland in the World”, a century of Ireland’s engagement as an active member of the international community in the promotion of democracy, peace and security.

After a few very challenging years caused by the pandemic, I am very pleased to see the return of physical celebrations of St. Patrick’s Day in Hong Kong after the stabilisation of the pandemic and the removal of anti-epidemic measures – especially our almost three-year masking requirement, which is a great, great move for our friends here and overseas visitors.

### Entrenched roots between Hong Kong and Ireland

While Ireland and Hong Kong are geographically quite far apart, Ireland and Hong Kong enjoy a very long history of excellent bilateral relations in a wide range of areas, from business, culture, to people-to-people exchanges.

The Irish presence has been well established in Hong Kong. We here in Hong Kong are surrounded by Irish surnames – Robinson<sup>1</sup> Road, Des Veoux Road<sup>2</sup>, Russell Street<sup>3</sup>, to name but a few, are all named after distinguished Irish that had set their footprints in the early days of Hong Kong.

I am also fascinated by how Ireland and Hong Kong are alike in various aspects. Both of us are small, open, dynamic, knowledge-based and service-oriented economies. The two places share similarities in belonging to the league of small economies that have succeeded and achieved similar heights, supported by a highly skilled labour force. Business wise, our bilateral trade in services has increased dramatically in recent years - at a rate of over 26% a year, from 2017-2020<sup>4</sup>.

### Irish legacy in the Hong Kong legal sector

At today's festive occasion, let's put business aside.

The Irish story runs deep into the DNA of many of Hong Kong's institutions – notably in the legal field. Many Irish legal practitioners served in the Government,

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<sup>1</sup> Hong Kong's fifth Governor Sir Hercules Robinson.

<sup>2</sup> Hong Kong's tenth Governor Sir William Des Voeux.

<sup>3</sup> Hong Kong's fifth Chief Justice James Russell.

<sup>4</sup> The latest figures available.

the Hong Kong Judiciary, as well as in the local legal sector. As an example, four of the Attorney Generals were Irish, including the first Attorney-General of Hong Kong, Paul Ivy Sterling, who served from 1844 to 1855. James Russell, the 5<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice of Hong Kong, he spoke Cantonese and was keen to have a good knowledge of the Hong Kong local community in order to advocate for people's benefits. Michael Hogan QC, Hong Kong's 17<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice, proposed to set up a law department in The University of Hong Kong; his proposal was accepted and the first law student locally trained was admitted next year in 1967.

### Strong fundamentals of Hong Kong

With such rich history of connection between us, Hong Kong can play a very significant role in the relationship between Ireland and China. Under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems", Hong Kong acts as the super-connector between China and the rest of the world, including of course Ireland. The rule of law, including judicial independence, will continue to be the most fundamental pillar and bedrock of our community.

Hong Kong's status as, amongst others, a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services has been reinforced in the National 14th Five-Year

Plan. With the Central Government's unwavering support, together with the concerted efforts of the society, including our Irish community, I am very confident that our business, cultural, legal and people-to-people connections will continue to thrive, and that there are countless opportunities ahead to enable us to foster a closer relationship in different areas, which would serve the common interest of Ireland, China, and Hong Kong SAR as a part of China.

### Closing

My dear friends from Ireland, as we celebrate the St. Patrick's Day together, may I sincerely wish the people of Ireland good health, prosperity and happiness, and that the friendship between the Irish people and Chinese people would be closer than ever. Thank you.