

Speech by SJ at closing ceremony of ICAC's Professional Anti-corruption Training in Major Infrastructure Projects (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at the closing ceremony of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)'s Professional Anti-corruption Training in Major Infrastructure Projects today (October 11):

Commissioner Mr Woo (ICAC Commissioner, Mr Woo Ying-ming), Deputy Commissioner Mr Yau (ICAC Deputy Commissioner Mr Ricky Yau), ICAC colleagues, consuls-general, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to officiate at the closing ceremony of the ICAC's Professional Anti-corruption Training in Major Infrastructure Projects, a training programme bringing together esteemed anti-corruption officers from Hong Kong, Macau and about 13 countries under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Corruption and the construction of infrastructures

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative. As the Secretary for Justice and Chairperson of the Working Group on Belt and Road Development under the Steering Group on Integration into National Development of the Hong Kong Government, I find it especially meaningful to share my views at this closing ceremony.

Since the inception of the Belt and Road Initiative, participants have jointly advanced "hard connectivity" involving the construction of various large-scale infrastructure projects in different countries. There is no doubt that the construction of infrastructures, such as sea ports, airports, railways and power plants, plays a vital role in promoting the prosperity of any modern society. These infrastructures develop urban spaces, define a city's unique outlook, facilitate connections between people both within and outside their respective countries, enhance economic developments and improve quality of life as a whole.

However, infrastructure projects invariably involve large sums of money, fierce competition and multiple levels of sub-contracting. Such projects are also very often subject to stringent regulation by the authorities. These features would, therefore,

render the execution of such projects particularly susceptible to corruption, both in the public and private sectors.

Without doubt, corruption undermines social fairness and justice, hinders economic co-operation and development and affects government credibility and the rule of law. It may also lead to the failure of important infrastructure projects. And therefore, it is vitally important to enhance the abilities to combat corruption in major infrastructure projects.

Highlights of the training programme

Since its inception in 1974, the ICAC has been at the frontline of fighting corruption on all fronts and at all levels in Hong Kong. With the ICAC's unwavering commitment, Hong Kong has been ranked by the Corruption Perceptions Index 2022 as the 12th least corrupt place out of 180 jurisdictions, and also ninth out of 140 countries and territories under Absence of Corruption in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2022.

Building upon its experience and expertise cultivated over the years, the ICAC's seven-day programme presents a unique opportunity for gaining insight into the anti-corruption measures implemented in Hong Kong and on the Mainland, and for engagement with representatives of the ICAC and the Guangdong Provincial Commission of Supervision.

While the theoretical foundations of topics such as corruption prevention, works supervision, and integrity management were imparted through a series of informative seminars, the site visits to major construction landmarks in Hong Kong and on the Mainland allowed for a first-hand experience of how anti-corruption measures are implemented in practice at various stages of the construction and infrastructure process and projects.

The continued fight against corruption by international co-operation

I note that this training programme is one of the pilot programmes of the Hong Kong international academy against corruption which, as the Commissioner has just mentioned, will be established in February 2024. The establishment of the international academy against corruption is a milestone in Hong Kong's efforts to join hands with other jurisdictions to fight against corruption together.

International co-operation is indeed critical to the fight against corruption, in particular in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. As stated in the white paper entitled "The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future" published by the State Council of the People's Republic of China yesterday, and I quote, the BRI is committed to "clean cooperation towards inclusive and sustainable development. It has zero tolerance for corruption and promotes steady and high-quality growth." It also urges that "All participants joined to combat corruption, strengthening their legal systems and mechanisms, harmonizing their laws and regulations, and fostering international cooperation. Furthermore, all participants stand united against all forms of corruption and other international criminal activities, and work consistently to combat commercial bribery. This ensures that financial resources and projects are managed with integrity and efficiency, leading to greater outcomes and making BRI cooperation an example of clean governance."

Concluding remarks

While the training programme ends today, our determination to fight corruption certainly continues. For Hong Kong, I am sure and can undertake that the ICAC and other branches of the Hong Kong Government will continue to promote international co-operation in combatting corruption in various ways. The success of anti-corruption is not only essential to the well-being of our respective societies but also the building of a global community of shared future, which is what the Belt and Road Initiative is really about.

Last but not least, I wish to congratulate the ICAC for having put together an outstanding training programme of such a high calibre, and all participants for successfully completing this training programme. I am sure that the insights you have gained and the knowledge you have acquired during this training programme will assist you in fighting against corruption in your respective capacities and jurisdictions more confidently and effectively.

Thank you very much, and I wish you all very good health and all the best.

Ends/Wednesday, October 11, 2023