

Speech by SJ at Law Society of Hong Kong's Pro Bono and Community Service Award Presentation Ceremony 2024 (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 2024 today (December 9):

Chief Justice (Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, Mr Andrew Cheung Kui-nung), President Roden Tong (President of the Law Society of Hong Kong), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join you all today at the 2024 Pro Bono and Community Service Award Ceremony organised by the Law Society of Hong Kong. On this special occasion, we come together not only to celebrate the outstanding contributions of the awardees this year but also to reaffirm our collective responsibility to uphold the rule of law and to ensure equal access to justice for all.

Our society has faced numerous challenges in the past years - the global pandemic, social unrest, as well as economic uncertainties caused in part by geopolitical tensions. These have heightened our sense of vulnerabilities and feeling of insecurity. Sometimes, the most marginalised, disadvantaged and underprivileged of our society may be the first to be affected. It is during these critical moments that we, as part of the legal community, may feel the urge to go the extra mile to provide support to those in need and to advocate for those who do not have the resources to advocate for themselves.

I am sure some, or I hope most, of us here would not merely see being a legal professional as only a job. To me, it is also a commitment to uphold the principles of justice, fairness, and equality that the rule of law promises. In a similar vein, pro bono work is not only about providing legal assistance free of charge. It is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of his background or circumstances, has equal access to the resources he needs to navigate the complexities of the law. By taking up pro bono work, legal professionals demonstrate a deep sense of civic duty and a commitment to uphold the rule of law which, needless to say, is and will always remain the core value of our society and the bedrock of our legal system.

Today, we celebrate the outstanding achievements of the awardees this year who have selflessly dedicated their skills, knowledge, energy and countless hours to help the needy and to serve the community. They are indeed inspiring role models who have set an excellent example for others to follow. However, as the Secretary for Justice, I am proud to say that my colleagues in the Department of Justice (DoJ) also share the same vision of taking up and promoting pro bono work and community service.

For instance, as some of you may already know, the DoJ has launched the Rule of Law Education Train-the-Leaders Programme, which aims to train community leaders from different walks of life to enhance their ability and effectiveness in disseminating correct messages on the rule of law. Recently, we joined hands with an NGO, SidebySide (善導會), to arrange trainees of the Programme to take part in mock trials at the Former North Kowloon Magistracy. Through community engagement activities of this kind, we hope to reach out to different sectors of our society, raise awareness of the principle of justice for all, and provide opportunities for others to take part in pro bono and community work.

The DoJ's role in the promotion of pro bono and community work is by no means limited to that of a facilitator. Our volunteer team in the DoJ has also in the past few months paid visits to NGOs, an elderly centres and transitional housing, to name a few, to show our care and concern to the less privileged of our community. Additionally, I have had the pleasure of personally organising several charity events for underprivileged children at my official residence throughout these past few years, and I am also excited to share that the next charity event will take place this Saturday. These events bring us immense joy as we strive to make a positive impact in the community. We truly believe that the practice of law is not only about the application of legal knowledge and skills in our offices or the courtrooms but also rooted in our integrity, compassion, commitment to serve, and a sense of belonging in our society. These are what guide and sustain us in our long legal career and our pursuit of justice.

In fact, the commitment to serve the community is not only confined to the Department of Justice. It spreads across the entire civil service of the HKSAR Government, which forms the backbone of our administration and Government. Indeed, just not long ago in November this year, the Secretary for Civil Service presented commendation awards to civil servants from different bureaux and departments for their

outstanding performance in volunteer service. By engaging with members of the public and meeting them face to face, civil servants could gain a better understanding of their real needs, stand a better chance of coming up with more informed and effective policies, and help cultivate a sense of unity and solidarity in our society.

Before I conclude, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Law Society for its contributions to fostering a pro bono culture in the legal community. Throughout the years, the Law Society has played a most critical role in raising awareness, providing trainings and creating opportunities for legal professionals to engage in pro bono work and community service. The initiatives that the Law Society has implemented, including of course the Pro Bono and Community Work Recognition Programme, provide an invaluable platform for legal professionals to make a positive change in society. These initiatives not only benefit those in need but also enrich the professional lives of those who participate.

In closing, may I once again congratulate all the awardees this year on their outstanding achievements and contributions to pro bono work and community service. They have shown us how we could help create a society that is inclusive, compassionate and dedicated to the pursuit of justice for all.

As we are approaching the end of the year, may I also wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you very much.

Ends/Monday, December 9, 2024