

Speech by SJ at 2025 SCIA and SCIAHK Spring Reception (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at the 2025 SCIA and SCIAHK Spring Reception today (February 13):

President Liu (President of the Shenzhen Court of International Arbitration (SCIA) and Executive Chairman of the South China International Arbitration Center (Hong Kong) (SCIAHK), Dr Liu Xiaochun), SCIA Council Members and SCIAHK Board Directors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning. I would like to begin by wishing you all good health and a prosperous Year of the Snake! It gives me great pleasure to join you today at the Spring Reception of the SCIA and SCIAHK. I am also very pleased to meet many old and new friends here, including Mr Li Ning.

The Year of the Dragon was a fruitful year for Hong Kong's arbitration community. Most notably, the ICCA Congress - hailed as the Olympics of the international arbitration community - attracted a record high of over 1 300 leading arbitration experts from more than 70 jurisdictions to Hong Kong last May. The Congress was warmly applauded for its diversity and quality in terms of participation and discussion. And for the present purpose, I have to mention the Shenzhen Side Event, co-hosted by the SCIA and SCIAHK, together with the Department of Justice (DoJ) and other institutions, which took place at the SCIA Tower in Qianhai. The event, featuring impactful and inspiring speeches, together with diversified thematic discussions, was attended by nearly 300 professionals from 36 countries and regions. Its success demonstrated the efforts of the Department of Justice in collaborating with the legal and arbitration sectors, including, of course, the SCIA and SCIAHK and other leading arbitral institutions in Hong Kong.

Indeed, we treasure our strong partnership with the SCIAHK. I am very pleased that the SCIAHK's representatives joined our promotion trips last year to the Middle East, Southeast Asia and also the Greater Bay Area (GBA) wherein we, as a team, promoted to the legal and businesses sectors of those cities the distinctive advantages of Hong Kong as a strongly competitive venue for dispute resolution and also, on a wider perspective, the latest developments in the legal and dispute resolution landscape in the GBA and beyond.

Looking ahead and anchoring on wisdom and agility, the symbolic elements of the zodiac sign of the snake, the DoJ will spare no efforts in fostering the competitiveness of Hong Kong's arbitration regime.

Firstly on wisdom, we will continue to draw on the collective wisdom of stakeholders, particularly our counterparts in the GBA. Under the GBA Legal Departments Joint Conference, we are working closely with Guangdong and Macao to work towards the promulgation of the first list of GBA arbitrators within this year. This initiative would promote the complementary strengths of arbitration resources in the GBA and provide

increased confidence and convenience to users.

Second, also on wisdom, starting from next month, Hong Kong-invested enterprises registered in all nine Mainland cities in the GBA may choose Hong Kong as the arbitration seat even in the absence of "foreign-related" elements. The Hong Kong business communities have been seeking such a wider choice of arbitration seat for a long time, and I am sure the latest extension would be very welcomed, and I do encourage businesses to make best use of such added flexibility under the CEPA framework.

In terms of agility, we strive to support the arbitration community to adapt to the changing needs in the dispute resolution landscape and cultivate new and specialised practice areas. In this connection, we are exploring possible options for the establishment of a neutral, fair and efficient mechanism in Hong Kong for settling sports disputes, leveraging our institutional advantages in dispute resolution and energising the sustainable growth of the arbitration industry. An advisory committee was established by the DoJ last month to work on the design and implementation of a pilot scheme in this area.

What is more, in order to make our arbitration talent to be more inclusive and adaptive, and as just announced by the DoJ yesterday, we have regularised and refined the Pilot Scheme on Facilitation for Persons Participating in Arbitral Proceedings in Hong Kong. Under the Scheme, relevant individuals may participate in arbitral proceedings in Hong Kong as visitors without having to obtain any employment visa. The Scheme has now become part of our standing immigration facilitative measures. Its scope will be expanded to cover tribunal secretaries and tribunal-appointed experts, and it will also cover all arbitrations physically taking place in Hong Kong, including those in which parties opt to have the seat of arbitration elsewhere. Such refinements would further facilitate the conduct of arbitral proceedings in Hong Kong, enhancing our attractiveness as a seat and venue for arbitrations.

On the part of the DoJ, in the days to come, we look forward to strengthening our collaboration with arbitral institutions, including the SCIA and SCIAHK, as well as other stakeholders, in showcasing Hong Kong's unique strengths under our common law system and enhancing our role as a "super connector" and "super value-adder" between the Mainland and the rest of the world.

As the saying goes, "A year's plan starts with spring" 一年之計在於春, I would like to share with you one of our important promotion initiatives this year. We will be holding the biennial Legal Services Forum in Xi'an in May. We chose Xi'an because we would like to work with our counterparts in Xi'an to leverage Hong Kong's strengths in supporting Xi'an's development in its role as the major central city of the western region in the country and also as an international gateway on the Belt and Road. We hope the SCIAHK could join and support the Forum in Xi'an if circumstances permit. Together with the stakeholders from the legal and dispute resolution sectors, I am sure that we would make the Forum yet another success.

Just a few days ago, the Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Mr Xia Baolong, visited, among other places, the SCIA headquarters in Qianhai, Shenzhen. This signifies the important role the SCIA and SCIA(HK) play in the development of a multifaceted dispute resolution system in the GBA and beyond. To this end, Hong Kong will, as always, continue to collaborate closely with all stakeholders, including, once again, the SCIA and SCIAHK.

On this note, I wish you all every success in the Year of the Snake, with wisdom, agility and loads of blessings! Thank you very much.

Ends/Thursday, February 13, 2025