

Speech by SJ at joint legal workshop "Strengthening Business and Legal Cooperation: Korea and Hong Kong" in Seoul, Korea (English only) (with photo)

Following are the opening remarks by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at the joint legal workshop co-organised by the Department of Justice and the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea on "Strengthening Business and Legal Cooperation: Korea and Hong Kong" in Seoul, Korea, today (October 24):

Mr Chung (Deputy Minister of the International Legal Affairs Department of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea, Mr Chung Hong-sik), Mr Jeong (Executive Director of the Trade Promotion Group of the Korea International Trade Association, Mr Jeong Hee-cheol), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It is my great honour and pleasure to welcome you all to the 2nd Joint Legal Workshop organised by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea, the Department of Justice of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, the Korea International Trade Association and the Korea In-House Counsel Association. Our theme today is "Strengthening Business and Legal Cooperation: Korea and Hong Kong". Building on the success of our first legal workshop held in Hong Kong in July last year, this event marks a significant step forward in our ongoing partnership.

Korea has always been a close partner of Hong Kong. In 2024, Korea was Hong Kong's fifth largest trading partner. The total merchandise trade between Hong Kong and Korea reached HK\$355.9 billion in 2024, representing a nearly 20 per cent increase from the previous year. This reflects the deepening economic exchanges and expanding opportunities between our two regions.

To facilitate these increasing exchanges and the exploration of these opportunities, and to safeguard the rights and interests of all relevant stakeholders, it is plain and obvious that reliable, high-quality and user-friendly legal and dispute resolution services are indispensable. This is precisely what Hong Kong may and can offer.

Under the fundamental principle of "one country, two systems", Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction in the People's Republic of China. It is also the only bilingual common law jurisdiction in the world using both English and Chinese. We have an independent judiciary with the power of final adjudication, business-friendly civil and commercial laws familiar to the international community, and a large pool of lawyers with extensive international experience and expertise in different areas. These legal professionals provide seamless, one-stop services across a wide range of matters covering the whole business cycle, from the formation of a business entity (including the raising of capital by public listing) to the realisation of profits derived from a business venture.

Fair and efficient dispute resolution services constitute an essential component of risk management. Apart from traditional litigations, alternative dispute resolution including

arbitration and mediation have become increasingly important in international trade and investment. Hong Kong has all along been well regarded as one of the top international arbitration centres in the world. According to the 2025 International Arbitration Survey conducted by Queen Mary University of London, Hong Kong ranks as the second most preferred seat for arbitration globally and the first in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2024, 76.4 per cent of the arbitrations submitted to the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre were international in nature.

Turning to mediation, the establishment of the International Organization for Mediation (IOMed) in Hong Kong demonstrates the city's unique advantages and opportunities in international mediation. The IOMed is the world's first intergovernmental international legal organisation dedicated to resolving international disputes, including disputes between a country and another country, a country and foreign nationals, as well as international commercial disputes, through mediation. The headquarters of IOMed has been established in Hong Kong, and IOMed formally opened a few days ago on October 20. We are also excited to share the news that we will construct the Hong Kong International Legal Service Building, adjacent to the IOMed headquarters, to house international legal and dispute resolution services institutions so as to further support Hong Kong's strategic position as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution.

A unique and significant advantage enjoyed by Hong Kong is its close connection with the legal system in the Chinese Mainland. Up to the present, Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland have signed nine mutual legal assistance arrangements, including mutual recognition and enforcement of civil and commercial judgments as well as arbitral awards; and the grant of interim measures in arbitrations, which is extremely useful in practice. All in all, Hong Kong's legal and dispute resolution services may be conveniently used to facilitate the exploitation of investment and business opportunities in the Chinese Mainland. This is why we say Hong Kong indeed serves as a gateway between China and the rest of the world.

Looking ahead, the Department of Justice is eager to continue building on the strong foundation of partnership we have with Korea. On this basis, I would like to take the opportunity to invite all of you to join us at our annual flagship event — Hong Kong Legal Week 2025 — which will be held from December 1 to 5, 2025, in Hong Kong.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our co-organisers of the workshop, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea, the Korea International Trade Association and the Korea In-House Counsel Association for their efforts in making this workshop possible; and, of course, all our distinguished speakers who will share their valuable insights in the two panel discussions. I wish you all a very productive and inspiring session ahead. Thank you.

Ends/Friday, October 24, 2025