

Speech by SJ at Law Society of Hong Kong's Pro Bono and Community Service Award
Presentation Ceremony 2025 (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 2025 today (December 12):

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

Good afternoon. I am very honoured to join you here today at the Law Society Pro
Bono and Community Service Award Ceremony 2025. This is an important annual event
that I never miss. I would like to begin by extending my warmest congratulations to all
the awardees.

In the present context, the Latin phrase "pro bono publico" means "providing free
legal services for the public good", in particular for those who cannot afford legal
representation. As we all know, an essential element of the rule of law is that justice
should be accessible to all. Access to justice is indeed a fundamental human right
guaranteed by Article 35 of the Basic Law. However, in practice, access to justice will
only be effective and meaningful if legal representation is available to all, but not just
those who can afford instructing lawyers. This is why legal aid and pro bono legal
services are essential to the maintenance of the rule of law.

I am pleased to say that, in Hong Kong, we have a very strong tradition of providing
legal aid and pro bono legal services. The response of the legal sector to the tragic fire in
Tai Po provides the best evidence. To begin with, I must pay tribute to the Law Society's
swift action in establishing the temporary panel under the Emergency Free Legal
Helpline for Tai Po Tragic Fire to provide preliminary free legal advice to the public. On
the other hand, the Legal Aid Department announced two days ago that it has established
a dedicated task force and will implement a series of support measures to assist residents
and other affected persons in applying for legal aid in accordance with the statutory
requirements to handle litigation and related matters. Solicitors on the legal aid panel will
be heavily involved in due course. In addition, the Judiciary has also announced that all

potential legal proceedings, including probate proceedings, relating to the incident will be handled with priority and expeditiously through a series of facilitative measures. At this difficult time, the whole legal sector, including lawyers and judges, are standing together with the victims and all those affected. I would strongly encourage all those in need to make use of the legal services that I have just mentioned.

Turning to community service, its scope is, of course, very wide. But I would like to highlight one particular type of community service which depends on lawyers and those who are legally trained. And that is rule of law education. To enhance the general public's awareness and general knowledge about the rule of law, and our legal and judicial system, is of crucial importance. In this respect, the Law Society has always been an invaluable partner to the Department of Justice.

We are extremely grateful to the Law Society for its most helpful input and dedicated support, from providing constructive and practical ideas to assist in the formulation of our rule-of-law education programmes, to providing experienced and passionate members to serve as speakers and group leaders in seminars and mock trial activities that we organised as part of our rule-of-law education programmes. Without the staunch support of the Law Society, our programmes could not have been successful.

Ladies and gentlemen, the provision of pro bono and community service ensures that the practice of law is not merely a means to enable lawyers to make a living. It enables lawyers to contribute in the building of a more fair and just society based on the rule of law, which indeed should be the ultimate objective of practicing law.

The awards to be presented today not only serve as a recognition to the services provided by well-deserved members but also an encouragement to other members to take part. On this note, may I conclude by extending my congratulations to all the awardees once again. Thank you.

Ends/Friday, December 12, 2025