Welcome remarks by SJ at Hong Kong Legal Week 2026: UNCITRAL's Contribution to the International Transport of Goods in the Digital Economy - A Celebration of UNCITRAL@60 (English only) (with photo/video)
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Following are the welcome remarks by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at Hong Kong Legal Week 2026: UNCITRAL's Contribution to the International Transport of Goods in the Digital Economy - A Celebration of UNCITRAL@60 today (November 4):

Mr Lee (Principal Legal Officer of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), Mr Jae Sung Lee), Professor Cheng (Secretary General of the International Organization for Mediation, Professor Teresa Cheng), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to welcome you today on this festive occasion to celebrate the 60th anniversary of UNCITRAL. For six decades, UNCITRAL texts have proven to be very useful tools in modern international trade law by creating a harmonised and enabling legal environment. Echoing the theme of the Hong Kong Legal Week this year, "Collaboration & Innovation: Legal Synergy for a Shared Future", I would like to highlight UNCITRAL's contribution to the international transport of goods in the digital economy, as part of UNCITRAL@60 global celebration.

Sixty years ago, the global transport of goods was primarily, if not solely, paper-based in tangible form. Bills of lading were paper documents with signatures in ink. The movement of physical goods was time-consuming, using ships or other modes of transportation carrying them from one continent to another and from one place to another. Today, in the age of digital transformation, trade can be instantaneous and digital assets can be traded around the world in seconds.

Against such a background, UNCITRAL has been reshaping the landscape of international trade continuously in a proactive way through harmonisation and modernisation of international trade law. While we take stock of UNCITRAL's contribution in the international transport of goods today, we are delighted to celebrate the formal signing of the United Nations Convention on Negotiable Cargo Documents, the Accra Convention, in Ghana last week. The Accra Convention establishes a uniform

legal framework for negotiable cargo documents, including bills of lading in both paper and electronic formats, across all modes of transport, including air, road, rail and sea. This Convention marks a major milestone for global trade facilitation, bridging the gaps in the legal framework governing multimodal transport and reducing documentary barriers.

As an international trade centre, Hong Kong is committed to promoting the development of digital trade. To take forward the digitalisation of trade documents, Hong Kong will introduce legislative amendments to facilitate the digitalisation of "Business-to-Business" trade documents this week, based on the Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records.

In addition, Hong Kong has been collaborating with UNCITRAL closely to promote UNCITRAL texts relevant to digital trade since the launch of the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy in 2024. For instance, we co-organised an APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Workshop on the Use of International Instruments to Legally Enable End-to-End Digitalization of Trade in Incheon, Korea, in August last year. At the 6th UNCITRAL Asia Pacific Judicial Summit last December, the conference centred on the theme "Building Towards End-to-End Trade Digitalization", and provided a platform to share experiences and exchange views on critical issues in facilitating digitalisation of the entire trade process, digitalisation of trade finance and digital assets, paperless trade systems, digital transformation in transport, as well as emerging trends in dispute resolution within the rapidly evolving digital economy, with reference to the application of UNCITRAL texts.

In line with Hong Kong's First Five-Year Plan and this year's Policy Address by the Chief Executive, the Academy will strengthen its connection and collaboration with international organisations like UNCITRAL, and facilitate the exchanges between international legal talent, so as to develop Hong Kong into a hub for training, exchanges and pooling of high-calibre legal talent of the country and the international community. The conference today is another exemplary example of how the Academy has contributed to capacity building for stakeholders and the future development of international trade law in collaboration with UNCITRAL.

Apart from co-organising events with UNCITRAL, we worked with UNCITRAL to set up the Inclusive Global Legal Innovation Platform on Online Dispute Resolution

(ODR) which will hold its sixth expert meeting tomorrow to discuss international development and potential issues relating to ODR. Furthermore, over the years, we have seconded more than 10 legal professionals from Hong Kong to both UNCITRAL Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific in Korea as well as UNCITRAL Secretariat in Vienna, who assisted in the research and promotional work of the relevant UNCITRAL texts.

Looking forward, as digitalisation of trade has been accelerating, UNCITRAL's work will become more critical than ever to ensure that the relevant international legal framework would evolve continuously in line with the development of the digital economy. Its ongoing work on legal issues related to the digital economy, including digital assets and the use of technology in dispute resolution, will be essential for the years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, UNCITRAL's contribution to the international transport of goods in the digital economy is not just a story of legal texts. It is a story of reducing barriers and ensuring interoperability. It is a story of creating a digitally enabled ecosystem for global commerce with legal certainty. Hong Kong is proud to be a part of the story.

To conclude, may I express my appreciation and congratulations to UNCITRAL for 60 years of contributions to the global community. I thank you all for being here today to celebrate this milestone and to shape the future of international trade law. I wish you all a very productive and inspiring discussion. Thank you very much.

Ends/Wednesday, November 4, 2026