

Speech by CE at Vientiane Secondary School in Laos (English only)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at Vientiane Secondary School in Laos today (July 29):

Principal Thongphan Oulaythone (Principal of Vientiane Secondary School), Professor Ben Young (Vice President of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University), teachers, students, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Sabai dee ton soi. Good afternoon. I am very happy to be in Vientiane, the grand capital of Laos – and here, this afternoon with you, at Vientiane Secondary School. I've been told that this is one of Vientiane's very best schools.

Having seen your traditional dance performance just a few minutes ago, I have no doubt that the students here are also among the city's most creative.

I was impressed by each and every one of the talented performers. The song you danced so beautifully to is called "Beautiful Laos". How appropriate. My delegation and I arrived in Laos yesterday. Since then, we have been in awe of the mesmerising beauty of your country's landscape, culture, and all its kind-hearted people.

As many of you would know, this year is officially "Visit Laos Year". Having seen the energy displayed by this country, I am confident that Laos will attract many people from all over the world, and that certainly includes Hong Kong, to see just how beautiful your country is.

We are visiting Laos to see, first-hand, your magnificent country, its businesses and its people, your hopes and your plans for the future.

I wanted to come here, to your splendid school, in particular, because I place great value on education. In Chinese culture – and I believe it's the same here in Laos – we attach critical importance to the education of our children.

We believe that our youth should have all the opportunities that education can provide, whatever their background, social standing, or cultural affinity.

We are fortunate that many academic, public and private organisations in Hong Kong offer scholarships to promising foreign students wanting to study in Hong Kong.

That includes you and other dedicated students from Laos, a key country in the Belt and Road region. The Belt and Road Initiative, as you may know, is a pioneering initiative proposed in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China, our country. The initiative has

since been advancing international connectivity, and is now a key platform for building a global community with a shared future.

I would like to add that the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has created a special scholarship for outstanding students from Belt and Road countries and regions. The Belt and Road Scholarship helps students undertake full-time university education in Hong Kong.

And I'm proud to tell you that universities in Hong Kong provide education of the highest international standards.

Hong Kong is the only Asian city with as many as five universities among the top 100 in the world. Our universities offer world-class programmes, and they are home to some of the world's top 10 schools in such disciplines as dentistry, nursing, education, data science, artificial intelligence, hospitality, leisure management and more.

I am pleased to tell you that the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, one of our universities in the world's top 100, is talking to your school about providing special scholarship opportunities for outstanding students here. A formal memorandum of understanding has just been signed this morning, so stay tuned for more details.

I can assure you that Hong Kong is a city full of opportunities of every kind, for your careers and for your life. We dream big in Hong Kong, and, let me add, we are realising our dreams. So can you.

To welcome more outstanding talent from Laos, we have already relaxed the visa policy for Laotian talent to work in Hong Kong, or study in our publicly funded universities. And once you've graduated from a Hong Kong university, you are eligible to stay in Hong Kong, work in Hong Kong, or simply enjoy life in Hong Kong, for up to 24 months, under our Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates.

For those of you who have not yet visited Hong Kong, let me give you a brief taste of our home. We are a safe and welcoming international city with a cultural blend of both East and West. Beyond the urban areas and business districts, you will find that most of our city, about 70 per cent of our landmass, is actually green countryside including country parks, beaches and conservation areas. We are also known for our huge range of restaurants and shops, lively nightlife and year-round calendar of arts and cultural events. In other words, you will never get bored, hungry or lonely in Hong Kong!

And after you graduate, whether you choose to pursue your career in Hong Kong, or Laos or elsewhere, you will be well equipped to contribute to the global community and the people around you.

I should also mention that this year is especially significant for exchanges between our communities. That's because 2024 is designated as the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges. Laos, one of the 10 member states of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), has much to gain,

much to enjoy, in taking part in this special year of exchanges in arts, culture, sports, education, and so much more.

That exchange could start right here, in Vientiane Secondary School. I know that many of you are learning Chinese in class. Language is an important medium for understanding a place, a culture, and a people. I applaud your efforts in studying foreign languages – which is by no means easy – and believe you could become good ambassadors of our cultures. I'm pleased to be sending you a series of books, written in Chinese, on the history, culture, technology and society of our country. I hope you will enjoy reading them.

My thanks to Principal Oulaythone, and everyone involved in today's marvellous dance performance, for inviting me to your school, and into the promising lives of your gifted students.

I look forward to welcoming you, and your family and friends, to Hong Kong very soon.

Until then, all the best with your studies and future pursuits. Thank you very much.