

# Speech by FS at French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Hong Kong Gala Dinner (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Hong Kong Gala Dinner this evening (June 6):

Consul General (Consul General of France in Hong Kong and Macau, Mrs Christile Drulhe), Alain (President of the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Hong Kong, Mr Alain Li), friends from the French business community, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Bonsoir. Good evening. Thank you for the kind invitation to join you at this splendid gala dinner. It is a real pleasure to be here with so many friends from the French business community in Hong Kong. Tonight is more than a celebration. It is a testament to the deep and enduring resonance between Hong Kong and France.

For many years, the French Chamber in Hong Kong has served as a bridge between our two economies, well beyond just business. From organising the Smart City Forum, to supporting signature events like French GourMay, you have contributed to closer co-operation and deeper friendship between our two peoples. Your efforts are truly appreciated.

Indeed, the ties between Hong Kong and France are strong and wide-ranging. In business and trade, we are trusted partners. Look at how French products are loved here in Hong Kong. From Bordeaux and Burgundy wines, cosmetics, designer fashion, handbags to sportswear, French elegance is everywhere in this city.

With the growing affluence of the Greater Bay Area and across the Mainland and the Asian region, I believe there is tremendous potential for French products to expand their presence. The appetite for French quality, craftsmanship and style is strong in this region.

With our strategic location, connections and deep understanding of these markets, Hong Kong is the ideal base to bring your ambitions to life. I'm heartened to see a rising number of French businesses establishing their presence here. As of last year, some 360 French companies call Hong Kong home, many serving as regional headquarters.

Let me assure you that Hong Kong remains firmly committed to open markets and free trade, despite rising protectionism and geo-economic fragmentation. We continue to offer a predictable, transparent and pro-business environment. One that best connects the opportunities in this part

of the world with businesses from Europe.

At the same time, with China being the largest Asian investor in France, Hong Kong has a unique and strategic role to play: as a conduit channeling Mainland investments into France, and as a springboard for Mainland companies going to Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, our partnership with France is not only growing in scale, but also in depth and diversity. French technologies and expertise have long contributed to Hong Kong's development in such areas as waste management, smart mobility, energy efficiency and construction engineering.

And new frontiers of co-operation are emerging, especially in the area of innovation and technology. With your innovation prowess and a vibrant startup ecosystem, France is actually one of the top sources of start-up founders in Hong Kong. And we are seeing more exchanges and collaboration. Following your participation in our InnoEX in April, I'm pleased to note that 20 Hong Kong start-ups, engaging in AI, biotech, green tech and fintech, will showcase their solutions at VivaTech's Hong Kong Pavilion next week.

Another exciting area of collaboration is aviation. A French company, which is a global leader in aeronautical services, will establish facilities in Hong Kong for aircraft dismantling, parts recycling and manpower training. This will support our vision to become a regional centre for aircraft parts processing and trading.

Beyond business, our affiliations are brought to life through people-to-people connections. In the first five months of this year, we welcomed over 64 000 French visitors, a 9 per cent increase compared to last year. Each visit, each exchange, adds to the vibrant tapestry of friendship between our communities.

These bonds will be enriched and sustained through arts, culture, sport and culinary delights. French creativity, elegance and excellence continue to inspire us here in Hong Kong. And we are equally delighted that Hong Kong's films and arts enjoy a good following in France.

We all eagerly look forward to more interactions. This July, our brand-new Kai Tak Sports Park will host a game featuring the Europa League champion. Yes, we want better. We're hoping to host the Champions League winner here some time soon. Or perhaps even Les Blues themselves.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we celebrate this evening of friendship and partnership, let's enjoy the fine food, wine and champagne, and most of all, the good company. Once again, I thank the French Chamber for organising this dinner. Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much.

