

Speech by SJ at Conference on Climate Change and International Trade Law (English only) (with photo)

Following are the opening remarks by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at the Conference on Climate Change and International Trade Law today (March 14):

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

On behalf of the Department of Justice of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), I extend my warmest welcome to our distinguished guests and speakers joining us in person, and to those of you joining online from all over the world to the Conference on Climate Change and International Trade Law, organised by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the Department of Justice of the HKSAR and the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy.

To begin with, I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the close and fruitful collaboration between the Department of Justice and UNCITRAL. UNCITRAL, as the core legal body of the United Nations system in the area of international trade law, has been working in commercial law reform worldwide for more than half a century with a view to harmonising and modernising various international commercial rules. As UNCITRAL will be celebrating its 60th anniversary next year, it is our privilege that the Department of Justice of the HKSAR has had the opportunity to work closely with UNCITRAL in recent years. For example, we have co-organised events such as the UNCITRAL Working Group III Inter-Sessional Meeting on the Use of Mediation in Investor-State Dispute Settlement, and worked with UNCITRAL to set up the Inclusive Global Legal Innovation Platform on ODR (online dispute resolution) that just had its fourth meeting yesterday, which involved discussions on potential issues relating to online dispute resolution and to foster development of innovative solutions. These collaborative efforts have allowed us to contribute to the evolution of international trade law and dispute resolution mechanisms.

In addition, we are delighted to see UNCITRAL's strong support for the secondment programme with the Department of Justice, which enables our officers to actively take part in UNCITRAL's work and enhance their knowledge of international legal matters, thereby strengthening Hong Kong's capacity in foreign-related legal affairs. I note that a number of our colleagues who have been seconded to the UNCITRAL Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific are also with us today.

I would also take this opportunity to introduce the Hong Kong

International Legal Talents Training Academy. The Academy was launched by the Department of Justice in November last year during the Hong Kong Legal Week 2024. While Hong Kong is committed to strengthening Hong Kong as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services, it is also our policy initiative to develop Hong Kong as a capacity-building hub in the region and beyond. Capitalising on Hong Kong's bilingual common law system and international status, the Academy regularly organises practical training courses, seminars, international exchange programmes and more to promote exchanges among talent in regions along the Belt and Road region and beyond. In fact, today's conference is the first collaboration between the Academy and renowned international organisation, UNCITRAL. I note the Academy will further collaborate with UNCITRAL later this year, including the organisation of a one-day workshop on "Use of International Instruments to Legally Enable End-to-End Digitalization of Trade" during APEC's meeting in Korea in August.

Coming back to the Conference today, climate change is an imminent threat to everybody on Earth. It has disruptive impact on global supply chains – interrupting production and raising costs and prices. The extreme weather also hampers transports, factories and infrastructure, seriously affecting international trade. Various types of climate change-related disputes arise. There are a number of Sustainable Development Goals under the United Nations 2030 Agenda addressing the situation that we are facing. In addition to Goal 13 on "Climate Action", Goal 7 on "Affordable and Clean Energy", Goal 9 on "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure", and Goal 12 on "Responsible Consumption and Production", Goal 16 of the Agenda aims to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". Collective efforts would be essential to take steps towards the achievements of this UN 2030 Agenda.

Hong Kong is a premier international financial centre as well as a green and sustainable financial hub. The international carbon market, Core Climate, launched by the Hong Kong Exchange, is the world's only carbon market to offer Hong Kong dollar and RMB settlement for trading of international voluntary carbon credits. In October 2024, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority launched the Sustainable Finance Action Agenda, which sets out its vision to further consolidate Hong Kong's position as the sustainable finance hub in the region and support the sustainable development of Asia and beyond. In December last year, the HKSAR Government launched the Roadmap on Sustainability Disclosure in Hong Kong, setting out Hong Kong's approach to require publicly accountable entities (PAEs) to adopt the International Financial Reporting Standards – Sustainability Disclosure Standards, the ISSB Standards. It provides a well-defined pathway for large PAEs to fully adopt the ISSB Standards no later than 2028. Other climate change initiatives in Hong Kong include setting net-zero electricity generation as one of the major decarbonisation strategies in the Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050. The HKSAR Government aims to achieve the long-term target of net-zero electricity generation before 2050 by increasing zero-carbon electricity supply through renewable energy development, and exploring new energy sources for electricity generation and regional co-operation.

In terms of climate change and international trade law, building on the efforts on the exploratory work of UNCITRAL and recent UNCITRAL colloquiums on climate change, the Conference today will discuss a wide spectrum of issues, from the UNCITRAL/UNIDROIT (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) study on the legal nature of verified carbon credits to UNCITRAL's texts in relation to public procurement, international sale of goods, public-private partnerships and dispute settlement relating to climate action. These topics are carefully selected for government representatives, legislators and policymakers, practitioners from the dispute resolution sector, commercial and finance sectors, scholars and experts to thoroughly consider how international trade law can effectively support the achievement of climate action goals set by the international community.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's conference has attracted about 600 participants from around 70 jurisdictions attending online and in person, and this demonstrates the importance of this Conference for participants across the globe. On this note, may I express my sincere appreciation to each of you for joining this Conference, whether online or in person. May I once again thank UNCITRAL for their dedicated efforts on this subject, as well as their support in bringing us together today. I wish you all a fruitful and constructive conference. Thank you very much.

