

Speech by SJ at Final Announcements of 18th Willem C. Vis (East) International Commercial Arbitration Moot (Virtual) (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC, at the Final Announcements of the 18th Willem C. Vis (East) International Commercial Arbitration Moot (Virtual) today (March 21):

Good day to all of you. It must have been an exciting week! I would like to congratulate all the teams who have made their way to the final round, and thank the Vis East Moot Foundation and everyone for making this 18th Willem C. Vis (East) International Commercial Arbitration Moot (Moot) a successful event. My heartfelt thanks to the Foundation for holding the Moot in Hong Kong again for about 1 000 participants and about 300 arbitrators from around the world. We hope that Hong Kong would continue to serve as the host city for the Moot in the coming years.

I recall thanking the Foundation last year for taking a bold lead in the moot's history to hold an online international arbitration moot competition. Being the first event of its kind, the virtual Moot exposed not only the organiser to new challenges but also the participants, arbitrators and coaches. As normal as this might seem today, it would have been inconceivable just a year ago.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused numerous changes to businesses almost across all the industries, and the legal and dispute resolution sector has not been immune. In times of social distancing, technology has become our lifesavers in maintaining stable operations when physical meetings and hearings are not an option. Among others, online dispute resolution (ODR) has undergone rapid development globally during such trying times. While the new normal settles upon us, there is no going back and it is believed that the use of technology is going to be sustained and thrive post-pandemic.

Indeed, the Government always attaches great importance to LawTech in using technologies to provide legal services, which is in line with the global trend. Hong Kong, China has opted into the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) ODR Framework last April and also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the APEC Secretariat on March 5 this year to establish a Fund for capacity building work on strengthening economic legal infrastructure. Moreover, we have launched the COVID-19 ODR Scheme in Hong Kong last year, which is operated by eBRAM Centre, to provide ODR services (including e-negotiation, e-mediation, and e-arbitration) for the resolution of COVID-19 related disputes, with the costs of mediators and arbitrators fully subsidised by the Government. This year, to promote the sustainable development of LawTech, the Department of Justice is actively exploring the development of Hong Kong Legal Cloud to provide safe, secure and affordable

data storage services, with a view to enhancing the capability of the profession to harness modern technology in the provision of legal and dispute resolution services.

We also support further development of LawTech, not just in Hong Kong but also internationally. As a new initiative, we have just established a Department of Justice Project Office for Collaboration with UNCITRAL to study legal issues relating to the increasing use of emerging technology and have set up the Inclusive Global Legal Innovation Platform (iGLIP) on ODR, composing experts around the world, to facilitate studies on ODR related issues.

Lastly, I would like to once again, thank the Foundation and all volunteers for their efforts and devotion in organising the Moot. The Moot this year again provides a wonderful learning experience of virtual hearings for the arbitration community and students, which I am sure will benefit them in their present or future real-life practice. Congratulations to all of you for taking part in the Moot. I hope you all a very fruitful and exciting experience. Thank you very much.