

Speech by SJ at opening ceremony of AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC, at the opening ceremony of the AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre today (May 25):

Good evening. Commissioner Liu (Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr Liu Guangyuan), Director Chan (Director of the AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre, Mr Nick Chan), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to you all as we celebrate the opening of the AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre today.

Last year, with substantial support from the Central People's Government, Hong Kong had the privilege to host the 59th Annual Session of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO), where Premier Li Keqiang announced the establishment of the AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre.

In 1974, AALCO had incredible foresight, deciding to forge ahead in developing institutional arbitration in the Asian and African regions. Since then, five regional arbitration centres of AALCO have been established, functioning as international institutions with the objectives of developing institutional arbitration and promoting international commercial arbitration in the Asian-African regions, and rendering assistance in ad hoc arbitrations, particularly those held under the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules. The AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre marks the sixth such centre to continue this important mandate.

The decision to establish a regional arbitration centre, particularly one in Hong Kong, is a result of extensive deliberations, negotiations and co-ordination since 2018, when AALCO resolved to establish a new arbitration centre in the Southeast Asian region. Hong Kong is honoured to be able to host the sixth AALCO regional arbitration centre, and it is my hope that it will, together with the existing AALCO arbitration centres in Malaysia, Egypt, Nigeria, Iran and Kenya, stand united by the ideals of friendship and collaboration by promoting trade and investment in the Asian-African region. All of this cannot be accomplished without the support and trust of the Central People's Government. Indeed, the establishment of the Centre constitutes a significant vote of confidence in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's position as a leading centre for international legal, dealmaking and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region, and its role in China's development as reflected in its 14th Five-Year Plan.

The establishment of the AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre

further enhances Hong Kong's status as a centre for international legal, dealmaking and dispute resolution services, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. This very nice space we are presently occupying will also form part of the Hong Kong Legal Hub, bringing together global expertise in the legal and dispute resolution community, and developing synergy between the legal, dispute resolution and business communities.

The AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre is unique in the sense that not only will it seek to integrate itself into AALCO's dispute settlement system, but the Centre will also promote the growth and effective functioning of arbitration institutions and other alternative dispute resolution services, including online dispute resolution, which I believe is a global trend. Through the Centre's future work, I hope that more and more businesses can see the value of using online dispute resolution to resolve disputes, particularly when the pandemic has taught us the vital lesson of the need to utilise technology effectively. In fact, it is my understanding that the Arbitration Rules of the AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre are explicitly designed for the use of online dispute resolution to provide a cost-effective and speedy resolution for disputes.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, to conclude I offer my wholehearted congratulations on the opening of the AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre, and wish it all the best in all of its future endeavours. The Department of Justice looks forward to working with the Centre and the legal and dispute resolution community to promote Hong Kong as an international legal and dispute resolution hub, which I believe will be beneficial to all. Thank you very much.