

The Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, Mr Geoffrey Ma Tao-li, will retire from office when he reaches the statutory retirement age of 65 on January 11, 2021. He has informed the Chief Executive of his intention to vacate judicial office. The requisite appointment procedures for the next Chief Justice under Articles 88 and 90 of the Basic Law should be initiated at this stage as soon as practicable in order to ensure a smooth transition.

Having regard to the experience of the time taken in the past appointment exercise of the Chief Justice and the current appointment exercise of the Chief Judge of the High Court (which is still ongoing), it is estimated that it would take at least nine months to complete the necessary constitutional procedures for the appointment of the next Chief Justice. By making the announcement of Chief Justice Ma's retirement at this stage, it is hoped that the appointment process can be completed by the summer of 2020, thereby allowing sufficient time to facilitate a smooth transition.

"I believe that my retirement at age 65 is in the best interests of the Judiciary. Proper succession planning is of vital importance. My retirement will be conducive to orderly succession planning in the Judiciary. By January 2021, I will have completed more than 10 years' service as Chief Justice and nearly 20 years as a judge. I consider it is appropriate for there to be a change in the leadership of the Judiciary after such a period.

"I am in no doubt that the Judicial Officers Recommendation Commission, of which I am the chairman, will fully discharge its responsibilities to ensure that an eminently suitable successor will be recommended for appointment. I am confident that my successor will carry on the mission of upholding the rule of law and maintaining the independence of the judiciary in Hong Kong. As I have stated many times before, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary are cornerstones of our community. The work of our courts means that judges strictly adhere to the law and the spirit of the law. No other factors will influence the work of the courts.

"Retiring at 65 is also consistent with my personal wishes as I would like to spend more time with my family. I made this decision when I turned 63 in January.

"I consider it to have been the greatest honour in my life to be able to serve the Hong Kong community and to lead the Judiciary. This I will continue to do until my last day in office," the Chief Justice said.

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