

Farewell sitting for The Honorable Mr Justice Leong Chief Judge of the High Court

I have convened this special sitting in the High Court to mark the retirement of Mr Justice Leong as Chief Judge of that Court.

Mr Justice Leong's working life began nearly half a century ago in 1954, when he joined the Hong Kong Government as a civil servant after completing his secondary education at Wah Yan College, Kowloon. For 9 years between 1954 and 1963, he worked successively in the then Prisons Department, the Royal Observatory and the Labour Department. It has often been said that experience of the world is important for an understanding of how the law functions and these 9 years of working experience must have stood him in good stead for his subsequent work in the legal field.

In 1963, Mr Justice Leong decided to leave Government and to read for the Bar which could then only be done in England. This was a bold decision. At that time, the Government scholarship scheme for civil servants to study law had not yet been established and he had to finance his study from his own savings.

He was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple in 1965. In 1966, he returned to Hong Kong to join the then Legal Department's, which then only had 39 lawyers. He was soon promoted to Crown Counsel and spent altogether 7 years there.

In 1973, he left the Legal Department to join the Judiciary. The Legal Department's loss was our gain. Thus, he began three decades of dedicated service to the Judiciary. And I am the 4th Chief Justice to have the honour and pleasure of serving with Mr Justice Leong.

After serving as a Magistrate, he was appointed as a Presiding Officer of the Labour Tribunal. That tribunal had just been established and its formative years owed much to his pioneering work. He was elevated to the District Court in 1982, to the then High Court in 1991 and to the Court of Appeal in 1997. In 2001, he kindly agreed to delay his retirement to answer the call of duty to serve as Chief Judge of the High Court.

Apart from the Judiciary, he served the community in other capacities. He had served for 6 years as Chairman of the Administrative Appeals Board, 9 years as Chairman of the Municipal Services Appeal Board, 10 years as President of the Long Term Prison Sentences Review Board and 8 years as Member and then as Chairman of the Advisory

Committee on Post-retirement Employment. He had also participated for many years in the important work of the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, including as its Chairman and currently as its President. He is active in his church, the China Congregational Church, serving as Vice Chairman and Chairman.

It can be seen that Mr Justice Leong's working life, including his judicial career of 30 years, has spanned the most momentous decades in our history. These decades have witnessed fundamental changes, economically, politically and socially, in our community. During this time, the independent Judiciary has not merely grown in size but has matured and developed as an institution. In the last three decades, Mr Justice Leong has played his full part in and has made an enormous contribution to the Judiciary's development.

As a Judge, Mr Justice Leong was versatile. His important contribution covered a wide field, including both civil and criminal cases, and embraces both trial work at all levels and in recent years, appellate work. He has made a particularly significant contribution to the development of the bilingual capacity of our courts. In relation to the use of Chinese, his work has been of pivotal importance.

Mr Justice Leong is widely respected for his admirable qualities: his dedicated hard work, his conscientiousness and thoroughness, his decency and fairness and his unfailing courtesy. Here is a judge who eschewed any flamboyance and went about his work with quiet confidence and effective competence. He wore the mantle of authority and discharged his responsibilities with utmost integrity and with modesty and humility.

Above all, Mr Justice Leong has a deep understanding of the judicial role, an understanding which he put into practice day in and day out in his court. He has a keen appreciation that the role of a judge is to understand the evidence and arguments presented by the parties, to consider them conscientiously and to adjudicate on the dispute fairly. It could confidently be said that over his judicial career of 30 years, all litigants before him, win or lose, would emerge from his court satisfied that they had had a fair hearing. And I venture to suggest that their experience in his court would have enhanced their respect for the courts and our judicial system.

Throughout Mr Justice Leong's working life, the devotion of his wife and family have been a great source of strength and support for him. They have every reason to be very proud of his tremendous achievements, achievements which were deservedly recognised by the community by the award of the Gold Bauhinia Star in the recent Honours List.

I am extremely grateful to Mr Justice Leong for the unstinting support he has given to me as Chief Justice. For this gentleman of gentlemen, both in and out of court, it could truly be said of his judicial career that he has fought the good fight, he has finished the race, he has kept the faith.

He is retiring from the Bench. But I am sure he will continue to contribute to the community in various capacities in his retirement. On behalf of the Bench, I thank him most sincerely for his dedicated contribution to the Judiciary and I wish him good health and every happiness.

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