

Speech by the Chief Justice

Following is the speech delivered by the Hon Chief Justice Mr Andrew Kwok-nang Li at the Dedication Ceremony of the School of Law, Chinese University of Hong Kong today (November 9):

I am honoured to be invited to give this address at the Dedication Ceremony of the School of Law. And I am delighted to be here.

This Ceremony to dedicate the establishment of the School of Law is of course a historic occasion. It is of momentous significance both for the Chinese University and for legal education in Hong Kong. For this distinguished University, the School of Law is an exciting addition to its varied and rich programmes. And for legal education in Hong Kong, which began in 1969 over 35 years ago, the founding of this new School is a milestone. The starting of a new Law School is an affirmation by the community of the pivotal importance of the rule of law. Substantial community commitment and investment are involved. The new School will add diversity to and will stimulate competition in the legal education scene. This should enhance the quality of legal education to the benefit of the community.

The first batch of undergraduates of this new Law School has just commenced their studies and will graduate with their Bachelor of Laws degree in 2010. Those who wish to enter the legal profession will be doing so in the early years of that decade after acquiring their postgraduate certificate and undergoing professional training. By the time they reach my stage of their professional life, it will be in the decade of the 2040's.

As we stand at this historic moment, and peer into the future, what does the future hold? What are the challenges which graduates of this new School will have to face in the coming decades in the 21st century?

The future is of course full of uncertainties and no one has any crystal ball to predict it reliably. But one can reasonably be satisfied of a number of matters. First, there will continue to be rapid developments in all fields of human endeavour. This follows the trend set in the last few decades of the 20th century but the pace of change is likely to accelerate. In particular, developments in the area of information technology have brought revolutionary changes and will continue to have a far reaching impact on our lives.

Secondly, with increasing affluence, citizens in all parts of the world will have growing expectations of the institutions which serve them. These include the universities, the professions and governmental institutions. These expectations relate not only to high standards of competence but also to the institutions' transparency, responsiveness and accountability.

Thirdly, there is no doubt that the economy of China, our Motherland, will continue to grow and develop rapidly. The phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy has led to challenging opportunities for the people of Hong Kong and these opportunities will continue to increase. There are exciting employment prospects in Hong Kong as a centre of international finance and trade as well as on the Mainland.

Fourthly, we live in an age of globalisation. The world has become globalised and increasingly so. We can with justification and, without poetic licence, speak of living in a "global village". Globalisation is usually discussed in terms of trade and services. But of even greater significance is the global market place of ideas. It enables the free exchange and vigorous debate of ideas. It knows no boundaries and will continue to thrive.

So, it is for this future that this new School of Law has to prepare its graduates. It is a future which is full of challenges, challenges which are exciting and indeed daunting. What are the expectations of the community of the graduates of the Law School? I wish to focus on three main points.

First, graduates must be equipped with the intellectual and professional skills to enable them to cope with a fast changing world. These include the ability to think and analyse critically and to reason logically. Good communication skills and a bi-lingual capacity will be essential. An understanding of the use of technology will also be necessary. The graduates will be making their contribution in a wide variety of fields in and outside Hong Kong. Many will be serving in the legal profession. Others will be working in business, government and non-governmental organisations. These skills, together with a commitment to life long learning, will stand them in good stead.

Secondly, graduates must possess the widest of horizons and the broadest of perspectives. It would be plainly insufficient for them to have an understanding of developments in Hong Kong. They must have an appreciation of advancements on the Mainland and in the world. Apart from an awareness of changes on the legal front, they must have an understanding of the political, social and cultural dynamics of other societies. They will be functioning as global citizens who can operate across borders.

Thirdly, graduates must have a strong sense of commitment to the community and of commitment to the betterment of mankind. They must understand the fundamental

importance of the rule of law and must appreciate the values that underline our legal system as well as the ethical dimensions of law. We must all remember that the legal profession is not merely a market driven business. And that the practice of law is not merely about a relentless drive for profit and a selfish pursuit of economic success. It is a profession with honourable ideals, ideals concerned with the rule of law and the attainment of justice for all. The lawyer should not be a mere legal technocrat but should be a true professional with a concern for the public good.

The community has every expectation and indeed has every right to expect that this new School of Law will produce graduates of the highest quality and the leaders of tomorrow to meet the exciting challenges facing Hong Kong as Asia's World City, which is part of China under the principle of "one country, two systems".

The School of Law has the potential to meet these expectations. It enjoys able leadership with Professor McConville as its Director and with eminent members serving on the Executive Committee, the Planning Committee and the Academic Advisory Committee. Its team of staff is distinguished and dedicated. It is adequately resourced and enjoys strong community support. And it has the advantages of being part of a distinguished university; a university with an established reputation for teaching and research of the highest quality and with traditions reflecting Chinese heritage and embodying an international outlook.

With the dedication, commitment and hard work of all concerned, the School of Law has started off very well. It is on a sacred mission to produce graduates who will be shaping our future. It must not fail. I am sure it will succeed. I wish it every success.

Ends/Thursday, November 9, 2006

Issued at HKT 19:24

NNNN