

**Chief Justice's Opening Remarks at
the Law Society of Hong Kong's Pro Bono and
Community Service Award Presentation Ceremony 2023
(13 December 2023)**

Secretary for Justice, President of the Law Society, Distinguished
Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to attend this annual ceremony which commemorates the *pro bono* work that you have done this past year.

2. Since the end of pandemic-related restrictions, there was a rush to 'get back to normal'. Amongst the understandable economic and business pressures following the pandemic, it is important that access to justice continues to be maintained. It is thus heartening to see that all of you have maintained and built on the *pro bono* side of your work. Indeed, it may be the best testament to your commitment to carry on *pro bono* work in a challenging economy.

3. The rule of law does not just lie in the impartial justice of the courts, but the protection of the rights of all – especially those most vulnerable. I note that the service target set for the Pro Bono Programme this year was 'People facing housing issues'. These are indeed amongst the most vulnerable persons in Hong Kong. I would like to commend all of you for your continued willingness to provide *pro bono* services, and, as evidenced by the number of awards given at

this illustrious event, the range of *pro bono* work taking place in Hong Kong continues to grow.

4. The importance of *pro bono* services to our community, and to the rule of law in Hong Kong, cannot be overstated. I must express our gratitude and admiration, not only for those who are receiving awards, but all who engage in *pro bono* work. No matter how great or small, this is extremely meaningful work, and I hope through greater recognition, such as today's awards, we continue to build the *pro bono* culture in Hong Kong.

5. As you will be aware, the term *pro bono* comes from the Latin *pro bono publico*, meaning 'for the public good'. The immediate good is to help address unmet needs for legal services. Even if it is just friendly advice, a sympathetic ear, this is important to the person in need. It is important to remember lawyers are not just commercial actors engaged in business, but representatives of the legal system itself. With that comes the trust of the public. What a lawyer has to say, even *pro bono*, carries great weight because of this representative standing.

6. From a broader perspective, the public good that is achieved is enhanced access to justice for society. This does not just mean that people have access to legal advice or representation. It also calls for people to have an understanding of their rights, an appreciation for

lawfulness, and a fair society. Not all legal advice is for litigation, but all legal advice should seek to enhance understanding of the law.

7. With enhanced access to justice comes the strengthening of the rule of law. At a time when the term ‘rule of law’ is used for different ends, and potentially being undermined, it is critical that the public’s belief in the legal system is maintained. The significance of *pro bono* work lies not just in the advice that is given, but also an affirmation of how the legal system functions. In this way, all *pro bono* work, large and small, accumulate to much greater effect than the sum total of that work to strengthen the rule of law.

8. *Pro bono* work also benefits those who are doing it. I imagine all of you feel a great deal of satisfaction using your legal training to assist those in need. *Pro bono* work enables lawyers to break the monotony of their day-to-day routine. It may also offer greater people-facing opportunities, or opportunities to work in areas you might not normally work in. So I hope that your *pro bono* work has been a rewarding experience on a personal level, and you will continue to carry on doing *pro bono* work in addition to your obviously heavy workloads.

9. The work of a lawyer is rightly considered to be difficult. The provision of *pro bono* services attaches to that work greater societal value, to assist those unable to assist themselves, and to defend

their rights. There is an inherent nobility to give of one's time and abilities to protect the rights of others, to make society a fairer place, and thus to strengthen the rule of law.

10. I would like to conclude by thanking each of you again for all your contributions – you should have no doubt how important the contributions are to Hong Kong as a whole. The Judiciary is grateful to see lawyers take the need for access to legal services so seriously, and hopefully the *pro bono* culture in Hong Kong will continue to grow and flourish by the good example that you have all set. Whether you receive an award today or not, to my mind, today's ceremony is about recognising all contributions and all the good *pro bono* work that has been done.

11. My heartfelt congratulations to all the award winners today, who have gone above and beyond, and my sincere gratitude to everyone for the hard work that you all do *pro bono*.

12. It only remains for me to wish you all a Merry Christmas, and to thank you again for your dedication and service! This truly must be the best side of the legal profession.