

**Welcome Remarks
at HKETO(Sing)'s 15th Anniversary Gala Dinner
on 11 June 2010 at Island Ballroom, Shangri-la Hotel, Singapore**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

- Good evening. Thank you for joining this celebration of the 15th Anniversary of the opening of our Office in Singapore.
- We have just reviewed together, through a video presentation, the good efforts that my former colleagues have made in building Hong Kong's bilateral relations with the ASEAN economies.
- And our bilateral relations have indeed flourished over the past 15 years. Since the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office was established in Singapore in 1995, over 60 bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding have been signed between Hong Kong and individual ASEAN economies, strengthening our cooperation in taxation, air services, mail services, financial services, education, cultural exchange and trade promotion. We are also working more closely together in combating transnational crime and providing assistance to each other in criminal as well as customs matters.
- If we zoom in on the economic front, the figures are also very encouraging. From 1995 to 2009, the total value of trade between Hong Kong and the ASEAN region has grown by over 110% from US\$31.2 billion to US\$65.7 billion, which represents an average of 5.5% growth on a yearly basis. The ASEAN region, taken as a bloc, was Hong Kong's third largest trading partner in 2009. In their own right, six of the ASEAN economies were among our top 20 trading partners in the same year. The region was also the third major destination of outward direct investment (ODI) from Hong Kong, with the total ODI stock amounting to US\$19.2 billion as at end 2008.
- Apart from exchanges in goods and services, the two-way flow of people between Hong Kong and the ASEAN region has also seen a significant increase. Looking simply at tourist arrivals in Hong Kong from the Southeast Asia, the figure has risen by 90% from 1.25 million in 1995 to

2.37 million in 2009 (*Note: the figures include visitors from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand only*). Over the same period of time, Hong Kong's ministerial-level officials alone have made over 110 visits to the ASEAN region.

- With the widening scope of cooperation between China and the ASEAN countries, you may be among those who wonder why Hong Kong should remain in the picture. Why not go direct to the Mainland of China, where other leading cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou are fast becoming the centres of gravity for business activities?
- The reasons why we believe Hong Kong will continue to play a key role in the future development of China-ASEAN relations as our nation's international financial centre, services and logistics hub and the premier platform for ASEAN enterprises to venture into the Mainland market are embodied in our city brand.
- Our strong fundamentals (e.g. simple tax system and low tax rate, free flow of information, absence of exchange control, corruption-free government, superb infrastructure, rule of law and independent judiciary) and the versatility of our people are what make up our unique Hong Kong brand.
- Free, enterprising and innovative, a people who value excellence and quality living; a dynamic and diverse society in a cosmopolitan, secure and connected city. That is what Hong Kong is about. And that is what you cannot find in any other city on earth.
- Lest you say I represent only the fast-disappearing minority who remain bullish about the future of Hong Kong, I would like to invite you to hear it from a few of my fellow residents. Here they are

(Video Show on Brand Hong Kong)

- Later tonight, you will also hear from two of our bright young musicians who are fine examples of our talented next generation who will lead Hong Kong in the years ahead.

- Yet we are certainly not settling into complacency. It is a fact of life that other cities are catching up quickly. For Hong Kong to remain competitive, we must keep up our pace of innovation and progress.
- One important factor of our success over the last century is our extensive business networks across Asia and the globe. It would be to our demise to neglect the ASEAN, which is one of the fastest growing region in the Asia Pacific.
- My colleagues and I are therefore here to carry on our predecessors' good work in furthering the mutual understanding and cooperation between Hong Kong and all the ASEAN economies. And in this regard, we will continue to count on the support of friends like you.
- Thank you once again for being with us tonight. We hope you will enjoy the exciting performances we have prepared for you, and have a very pleasant evening.