

Speech by Commissioner for Tourism at Hong Kong Exhibition
and Convention Industry Association annual dinner (English only)

Following is the speech by the Commissioner for Tourism, Miss Margaret Fong, at the 19th annual dinner of the Hong Kong Exhibition and Convention Industry Association this evening (May 29):

Mayor Li (Yong-chan), Stanley (Chu), friends from the MICE sector, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. Thank you, Stanley, for your kind introduction.

I have the delightful duty tonight of celebrating the 19th anniversary of the Hong Kong Exhibition and Convention Industry Association (HKECIA), an occasion to recognise the contribution you have made in promoting Hong Kong as a trade fair capital and a premier MICE destination.

The MICE sector has over the years played a key role in Hong Kong's economic development. This is owed in no small part to the steadfast efforts of the HKECIA and its members in spearheading market development, nurturing talent, and upgrading Hong Kong's MICE profile on the Mainland and overseas.

Despite the many challenges brought by the global financial crisis, we received over 1.1 million visitors last year who came to attend exhibitions, international conferences or business meetings hosted in our city, or on incentive travel. There is, of course, room for many more.

When the economy gets tough, buyers and exhibitors tend to be more selective and will only be joining the best fairs in the region. This is where Hong Kong comes in.

Our fundamentals are sound - we have a well established legal system, high-quality services, superb infrastructure and excellent connectivity via air, land and sea. The very elements the global business community has come to expect from an international business hub and a MICE capital.

But what is more, we have the biggest single market as our hinterland, and we are taking full advantage of our integration with the Mainland economy. People come to

our fairs because we can attract the Mainland exhibitors and buyers, in addition to exhibitors and buyers from round the world. It is in Hong Kong that business deals are made.

That explains why Hong Kong is now hosting Asia's, if not the world's, largest fairs on watches and clocks, gifts and premiums, electronics, fashion, lighting goods, and jewellery, and other UFI-approved shows such as HOFEX. And we are constantly expanding our exhibition portfolio to include new highlights, like the Asian Aerospace Expo, the Asia Funeral Expo, ArtHK, and VinExpo to name but a few.

Hong Kong has won recognition as a world-class MICE destination. But we cannot rest on our laurels. We must continue to upgrade both our hardware and software to stay competitive. And we must also bring more signature events to Hong Kong to reinforce our position as a premier MICE destination. To do this, the Government has, last year, earmarked \$150 million for the promotion of Hong Kong as a preferred MICE destination worldwide. We have also set up an Alliance Group on MICE which bring together the local and overseas offices of the Government, Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), Invest HK and Hong Kong Trade Development Council to ensure a coordinated strategy in targeting and lobbying international fairs and conventions to be held in Hong Kong. SIBOS 2009, InfoCom Asia 2010, and World Congress of Nephrology 2013 are just a few examples.

With dedicated funds from the Government, HKTB launched its Meetings & Exhibitions Hong Kong office in November last year to provide one-stop support to organisers of MICE events. Its launch campaign in target cities round the world has been very well received. To give buyers, exhibitors and business travellers more incentive to stay with us longer, MEHK recently put together the "Business Right Here" programme, a value package that few could resist. This is made possible by the staunch support of HKECIA and our airline, hotel and attractions partners. In challenging times like this, all our travel trade partners must come together to offer the best package possible as our competitors will be trying hard to out-do us at every turn.

Ladies and gentlemen, Hong Kong's entrepreneurs have a well-earned reputation for leveraging on core strengths and rising to new challenges. Our iconic skyline is like a bar chart of our progress - the towers have become taller and more striking in tandem with Hong Kong's transformation into a services and knowledge-based economy.

As I look around this room, I see veterans of the industry who have contributed to our success over the past few decades. I applaud your dedication. Together we will continue to harness the world famous "can-do" spirit of the Hong Kong people to yield impressive results for our MICE industry in the years ahead.

Thank you.

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