

Speech by SCED at welcoming ceremony of Ovation of the Seas (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, at the welcoming ceremony of Ovation of the Seas of Royal Caribbean International today (June 17):

Michael (President and CEO of Royal Caribbean International, Mr Michael Bayley), Anthony (Executive Director of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, Mr Anthony Lau), captain, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to join all of you here in welcoming the arrival of Ovation of the Seas at Hong Kong for the first time. It is indeed a very significant occasion which marks an important milestone of cruise tourism in Hong Kong. Thanks, Michael, for inviting me to be part of this important event.

I have been very excited about the arrival of Ovation of the Seas at Hong Kong. As Michael may remember, my office can see the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and I have been waiting for this mega cruise ship to sail past the Victoria Harbour and berth at Kai Tak for some time. My excitement was further fuelled by the nice photos showing the maiden journey of Ovation of the Seas in Dodo's (Miss Dodo Cheng, the master of ceremony) Instagram which my colleague showed me a few weeks ago.

Ovation of the Seas is the second Quantum-class cruise vessel that visits Hong Kong. It also belongs to the largest cruise vessels that have ever berthed at Hong Kong, with the same capacity of the Quantum of the Seas, which first visited Hong Kong last year. The arrival of Quantum-class vessels at Hong Kong indeed signifies the quantum leap of our cruise tourism development in recent years. Taking the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal alone as an example, the ship call figures have experienced continuous growth over the past three years. We had 28 ship calls in the first full year of operation in 2014, then 56 in the second year in 2015. We have over 30 ship calls in the first five months in 2016 and we anticipate that there will be a total of 97 this year. The passenger throughput at Kai Tak Cruise Terminal in 2015 reached 260 000, which has doubled that in 2014 and is larger than the figure of all the berthing facilities in Hong Kong taken together in 2013.

I am delighted to see this healthy growth and would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to our partners in the cruise industry, including Royal Caribbean, for their confidence in making significant deployment to Hong Kong. I would also like to thank

the hard work of the travel trade for the efforts in promoting cruise tourism. With all your sterling effort, I have every confidence in the future of cruise tourism in Hong Kong, and I am sure that you will continue to work together and play to the strength of Hong Kong in bringing our cruise tourism to new heights.

Ovation of the Seas means far more than just being the largest cruise vessel that has ever visited Hong Kong. It will also be the largest cruise vessel that has ever homeported in Hong Kong. In the coming October and November, she will be here in Hong Kong for a mini-season of two months, offering a number of attractive itineraries that start and end at Kai Tak Cruise Terminal. Together with the Voyager of the Seas, which just started its summer homeporting season in Hong Kong last week, it will be the first time that an international cruise line deploys two cruise vessels to Hong Kong as the homeport for running conventional itineraries during different times of the year. This clearly signifies our appeal as a cruise destination and our capability of being an ideal homeport.

We welcome and encourage international cruise lines to choose Hong Kong as their homeport. We have a very efficient and modern Kai Tak Cruise Terminal which can complete immigration clearance of 3 000 passengers every hour. We also have a comprehensive aviation network with more than 100 airlines offering over 1 100 flights every day. In short, we have all the necessary competitive edges in being the best homeport in Asia.

This year, the Financial Secretary has announced in his Budget an initiative to promote fly-cruise tourism. The Government has allocated additional resources to the Hong Kong Tourism Board to partner with international cruise lines to launch marketing and promotional campaigns for cruise itineraries using Hong Kong as a turnaround port in targeted overseas markets.

With the concerted efforts from all parties, together with our firm commitment in promoting cruise tourism, we are confident that cruise tourism in Hong Kong will continue to grow in a steady and sustainable manner. I am sure that we would meet again soon to celebrate another milestone of the cruise tourism development in Hong Kong.

Once again, a warm welcome to the Ovation of the Seas. And I wish you all an enjoyable day on board.

Thank you.

Ends/Friday, June 17, 2016

Issued at HKT 12:32