

SCED's speech at opening reception of Hong Kong Festival in Auckland (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, at the opening reception of the Hong Kong Festival co-organised by the Hong Kong New Zealand Business Association (HKNZBA) and the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Sydney in Auckland, New Zealand, today (August 5, Auckland time):

Minister Sharples (Minister of Maori Affairs, Dr Pita Sharples), Mayor Brown (Mayor of Auckland, Mr Len Brown), Mr Niu (Chinese Consul-General in Auckland, Mr Niu Qingbao), Stella (HKNZBA President, Ms Stella Chan), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Kia ora (meaning "hello" in Maori).

Good evening. It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Auckland.

Hong Kong and New Zealand enjoy a long, friendly and fruitful history. The first New Zealand Consul-General to Hong Kong took residence in our city in 1960. Since then we have nurtured our business and cultural ties side by side.

Today, Hong Kong is one of the most culturally diverse places on earth, thanks not least to the some 2 000 New Zealanders who have made our city their home away from home. This number swells considerably when you count those with dual nationalities. And, at the end of March every year, during the world famous Hong Kong Rugby Sevens tournament, it seems that almost everyone supports the All Blacks!

Our young people are also keen to learn more about New Zealand. Some 500 people from Hong Kong have taken advantage of our bilateral Working Holiday Scheme to experience the New Zealand culture and way of life. At the same time, around 400 New Zealanders have used the Scheme to enjoy their Asia experience in Hong Kong.

One of the biggest events in the Auckland cultural calendar is the Lantern Festival. Our Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Sydney has proudly supported the festival for the last six years. It is a wonderful celebration of Chinese culture in New Zealand. For the first time, this year we also participated in the Christchurch Lantern Festival at Hagley Park to welcome the Chinese New Year. We are proud to be part of these festivals.

It is this kind of people-to-people relationship and connection of ideas, values and creativity that has built such a rich history between us.

Earlier, I attended the Connect Hong Kong business seminar in Auckland. During the seminar, we discussed the growth of bilateral trade since the New Zealand-Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Agreement was implemented in 2011. We also talked about Hong Kong as a showcase for the New Zealand brand, and we highlighted Hong Kong's appeal as a free, open and low-tax platform for business.

These are some of the attributes that have contributed to Hong Kong's successful development as a Special Administrative Region of China under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems".

Hong Kong's unique East-meets-West culture, and excellent location, continues to help attract tourists both from Mainland China and around the world. Last year, we welcomed 48 million visitors, with 35 million coming from the Mainland of China. Two months ago, we witnessed the inaugural berthing at Hong Kong's brand new cruise terminal. The terminal is capable of handling the world's largest cruise liners and is located in our spectacular Victoria Harbour at the site of the old Kai Tak airport.

We hope to attract more cruise tourism to Hong Kong and continue our city's great seafaring tradition, which is a trait that we share with New Zealand.

In Hong Kong, visitors can enjoy city-wide duty-free shopping, extraordinary cuisine, bustling street scenes, lively nightlife and world-class theme parks, all in a very safe multicultural and multilingual environment.

We also have a special treat for wine lovers: Hong Kong became the first free wine port among major economies by eliminating tariffs on wine in 2008. This has helped to promote the city as a wine trading and distribution centre in Asia. New Zealand wine traders have been able to take advantage of this trend to tap into the growing appetite for fine wine in Mainland China.

Of course, Hong Kong is known for its wine and dine culture developed over many decades. Building on this experience, we have established major international food and wine exhibitions to promote the industry. We have also overtaken New York and London to become the world's largest wine auction market. New Zealand vintages are

becoming increasingly popular and familiar to people in Mainland China and across Asia. They have a great reputation for quality and value for money.

Looking ahead, we are keen to share Hong Kong's cultural delights with the world and to promote our city as a cultural hub in Asia. This includes building a massive West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) on 40 hectares of prime waterfront land. The project is well under way and will be completed in phases starting from 2015.

The WKCD will comprise 15 performing arts venues of different types and scales, including the M+ museum focusing on 20th to 21st century visual culture, mega performance venues, concert halls and music chambers and theatres of various sizes and functions. Though it is still in its early phase of development, the WKCD has generated new interest and enthusiasm for arts and culture in Hong Kong, and further afield. We very much welcome cultural performances and creative talents from New Zealand to be part of this exciting project.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for coming to the opening of the Hong Kong Festival which, for the first time, is being staged in both Auckland and Wellington.

I thank the Hong Kong New Zealand Business Association and all the volunteers who have worked hard to make this event a great success.

I hope that all our visitors have a memorable time at the Festival and that you bring your family and friends to share the enjoyment. I also hope that it will inspire our New Zealand friends to book a flight, or even embark on a cruise, to Hong Kong and enjoy our city's many pleasures for yourselves.

Thank you very much and have a great evening.

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