

**For discussion on
24 June 2024**

**Legislative Council Panel on
Administration of Justice and Legal Services**

**Report on the Fruitful Results of the Secretary for Justice-led
Delegation Visit to the Middle East**

Introduction

The Secretary for Justice (SJ) led an about 30-strong delegation, comprising representatives from the Law Society of Hong Kong (LSHK), the Hong Kong Bar Association, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), Invest Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited and related sectors, on a visit to Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and Abu Dhabi and Dubai in United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 18 to 24 May 2024 (Visit), to promote Hong Kong's legal and dispute resolution services and enhance co-operation and exchanges between Hong Kong and the Middle East. The Visit was conducted with the support of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Dubai (Dubai ETO) and HKTDC. This paper briefs Members about the Visit and the fruitful results achieved through the Visit.

Visit to Riyadh, KSA

2. The delegation visited Riyadh, KSA from 19 to 20 May 2024. A lunch and networking reception titled "Hong Kong – The Common Law Gateway for Saudi Arabia Businesses to China and Beyond" was held on 19 May 2024, which was co-organised by the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Dubai ETO, HKTDC and the Saudi Chinese Business Council, and supported by Invest Hong Kong. SJ delivered the welcome remarks at the reception, which was attended by about 100 participants from the legal, business and other sectors.

3. The reception provided a valuable opportunity for the local attendees to network with the delegates from Hong Kong and be briefed on Hong Kong's unrivalled advantages of enjoying strong support from the motherland while being closely connected to the world under "one country, two systems", as well as its unique edges as the only common law jurisdiction within China with well-established legal system and top-notch legal and dispute resolution services.

4. During their time in Riyadh, the delegation called on the Vice Minister of Justice of the KSA, Dr Najem bin Abdullah al-Zaid, to discuss and exchange views on various areas of legal co-operation, including litigation, arbitration, mediation and developments in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of Cooperation between the DoJ and the Ministry of Justice of the KSA in Hong Kong on 22 April 2024 to strengthen co-operation on issues relating to dispute avoidance and resolution. The delegation was also invited to a dinner with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the KSA, Mr Chang Hua.

5. The Visit in Riyadh had also brought about exchanges on the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) aspect. The delegation visited the Saudi Center for Commercial Arbitration (SCCA) and conducted a meeting with the SCCA's board of directors, fostering exchanges on ADR-related matters including arbitration, mediation and online dispute resolution services. The delegation also visited the local office of a leading AI software company founded in Hong Kong, which is amongst one of the first AI firms to achieve unicorn status and expanding its presence worldwide, to gain better understanding of the business opportunities and challenges for the Hong Kong enterprises operating in Saudi Arabia. The delegation also had the opportunity to visit the At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to learn more about the history and culture of Saudi Arabia.

Visit to Abu Dhabi, UAE

6. The delegation visited Abu Dhabi, UAE from 20 to 21 May 2024. To better understand the need of businesses in the Middle East for cross-jurisdictional legal services, the delegation met with the Abu Dhabi

Chamber of Commerce and Industry and introduced to the local business sector Hong Kong's diversified legal and dispute resolutions services. The delegation also met with senior representatives of the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) to understand the operation of their courts and arbitration centre, and exchanged views on the recent developments in the arbitration landscapes in Hong Kong and Abu Dhabi, and the impact of technology on the provision of online dispute resolution services.

7. To enhance understanding of the UAE financial sector's demand for legal services, the delegation received a market briefing from HSBC, Middle East and had a networking luncheon with their senior executives to elaborate on Hong Kong's comprehensive professional legal services and its strengths in the rule of law.

8. The delegation attended a dinner with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the UAE, Mr Zhang Yiming, and visited the Louvre Abu Dhabi to experience the cultural side of Abu Dhabi.

Visit to Dubai, UAE

9. The delegation visited Dubai, UAE from 21 to 23 May 2024. As a highlight event of the Visit, a forum and networking luncheon titled "Hong Kong – The Common Law Gateway for UAE Businesses to China and Beyond" was organised by the DoJ, HKTDC and Dubai ETO, and co-organised by the Dubai Chambers, for promoting Hong Kong's legal and dispute resolution services.

10. The forum and networking luncheon attracted more than 300 participants from the legal, business and other sectors of the UAE. SJ delivered opening remarks and keynote speech at the forum and networking luncheon respectively. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the UAE and the President and CEO of the Dubai Chambers, Mr Mohammad Ali Rashed Lootah, delivered speeches at the forum. Deputy Executive Director of the HKTDC, Dr Patrick Lau, also gave welcome remarks at the networking luncheon.

11. In the plenary session of the forum titled “Hong Kong as an International Legal and Dispute Resolution Hub: A One-Stop-Shop for your Business Expedition”, speakers from the delegation shared with the local audience the ease of setting up a company and re-domiciliation of foreign companies in Hong Kong, the growth and maturity of a company including raising capital and the opportunities in the Mainland, the resolution of legal disputes in Hong Kong through a wide spectrum of legal and alternative dispute resolution services, and the corporate restructuring means available for a company in Hong Kong and related issues. In the two breakout sessions following the plenary session, delegates from the Hong Kong legal and dispute resolution sectors shared their insights on the topics of “Supporting Business Growth with Hong Kong’s Legal Services” and “Effective Dispute Resolution in Hong Kong”.

12. SJ had a meeting with the Minister of Justice of the UAE, Mr Abdullah bin Sultan bin Awad Al Nuaimi, to discuss issues of mutual interest and explore opportunities to foster legal collaboration between Hong Kong and the UAE. The delegation met with the Dubai Legal Affairs Department, called on the Consulate-General of the People’s Republic of China in Dubai, and visited various institutions including the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) Courts and the Dubai International Arbitration Centre (DIAC). On the business front, the delegation also met with the Chairman of the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Abdallah Sultan Al Owais, and the President and CEO of the Dubai Chambers to discuss and explore business opportunities and related matters, while highlighting Hong Kong’s robust legal system and its strengths in international legal and dispute resolution services.

13. During the Visit, the LSHK and the DIFC Courts signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen their co-operation to promote exchanges and the development of the legal professional services between Hong Kong and Dubai.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

14. The Chief Executive’s visit to the Middle East last year opened up market opportunities between the Middle East and Hong Kong. In March this year, the Deputy Secretary for Justice-led small delegation attended the

inaugural Riyadh International Disputes Week (RIDW), with the support from DoJ for the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre (HKIAC) to host a thematic event during the RIDW. Our Middle East counterparts, such as ADGM and DIAC, visited Hong Kong in May 2024, and were great supporters to the International Council for Commercial Arbitration Hong Kong Congress. The Visit marks the first overseas delegation visit to the Middle East led by SJ since he took office in July 2022, specifically on the legal front, which further solidifies the existing collaborations and opportunities for exploring new areas of cooperation with the Middle East on the legal front.

15. At the government-to-government level, the Visit presented further opportunities for the Ministry of Justice of the KSA and DoJ to discuss cooperation under the Memorandum of Understanding of Cooperation signed in April 2024. For instance, the Ministry of Justice of the KSA has invited DoJ to attend future events held in Saudi Arabia including the International Conference on Justice on 10-11 November 2024, while DoJ will be inviting the Middle East counterparts to attend events held in Hong Kong including the Hong Kong Legal Week 2024. The Ministry of Justice of the KSA and DoJ will also strengthen collaborative work on capacity building. Further, DoJ's discussion with the Ministry of Justice of the UAE during the Visit has also paved the way for discussing the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding of Cooperation between the two sides.

16. At the private sector level, the Visit has provided a bridge for further communications between Hong Kong's legal sector and the Middle East's legal and business sectors. Apart from the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the LSHK and the DIFC Courts during the Visit, the HKIAC is also in active discussion with the SCCA on signing a Memorandum of Understanding. Overall, the delegation finds the Visit fruitful and rewarding, providing them with direct opportunities to explore collaborations and connect with Middle East counterparts.

17. As elaborated above, more than 20 meetings and events were held and attended by the delegation throughout the Visit, among which promotional forum and luncheons were held. Through these activities, the delegation promoted Hong Kong's one-stop legal services through sharing their expertise and practical experience with the local legal and business community, and

highlighted Hong Kong's unique strengths under the common law system and its strategic role as a "super connector" and "super value-adder" between the Mainland and the rest of the world that would facilitate overseas businesses to explore investment opportunities in China and beyond. Furthermore, the Visit has cultivated close friendship and partnership between Hong Kong and the Middle East, laying a solid foundation for future collaborations between the two places.

18. The Visit had achieved the intended objectives of promoting the high quality legal and dispute resolution services of Hong Kong, strengthening close bonding and mutual understanding with the local related sectors and government officials, and deepening the understanding of the Middle East culture. In particular, the Visit has enhanced legal exchange and cooperation between the Middle East and Hong Kong at both the government-to-government and private sector levels.

19. The DoJ will continue to review the feedback received from the delegation and review their follow up actions arising from the Visit. Meanwhile, we will continue to exert efforts to reach out to other parts of the world to tell the good and accurate stories of Hong Kong and promote Hong Kong as a leading centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Department of Justice
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