

**“A Future without Corruption –
One Vision, Multiple Strategies”**

Closing Remarks

**Mr Simon Y.L. PEH
Commissioner of ICAC, HKSAR
at the Sixth ICAC Symposium
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Good afternoon, ladies, gentlemen, friends and colleagues.

As this 6th Symposium draws to a close, please allow me to reflect briefly on what we have shared and learnt during the past few days.

2. Throughout the many exchanges and discussions that have taken place since I welcomed you on Monday, it has become clear that while our shared vision of a world free of corruption remains an ideal, it is an ideal worth striving for. It is true that we face a number of daunting challenges, but they are not insurmountable. By sharing our insight and experience over the last few days, I feel certain we have moved forward in re-affirming how we can overcome the obstacles in our path.

3. During the opening keynote speeches, we heard how the rule of law and effective legislation are key elements underpinning any anti-corruption strategy. Equally there must be respect for the limits that the law imposes in order to protect fundamental rights and freedoms.

4. We also heard how grand corruption has the potential to distort and exploit entire systems of governance for the benefit of the political elite. The effect on the civilian population can be devastating, often increasing poverty and impairing development of vital public services. Our counterparts from the Mainland of China stressed the importance of international cooperation and the need to ensure that there are no safe havens where offenders can hide their ill-gotten gains. This point was strongly reinforced by a case study from the European Union, which highlighted the need for efficient cooperation and adequate punishment of offenders. To this end, it is important from a strategic standpoint to articulate and explain the full extent and nature of the harm that can be caused by corruption.

5. At the First Plenary Session, the speakers examined past successes and the challenges to come. Time and again the value of partnerships, both domestic and international, was emphasized as essential when formulating an effective enforcement strategy. We agreed that well developed anti-corruption systems prioritize prevention and education along with law enforcement. Political will and an independent judiciary were also seen as necessary, but not sufficient, factors contributing to the success of any anti-corruption regime.

6. We were reminded that even low level corruption can have a high level impact, so a zero tolerance approach is important. Public confidence can be maintained if citizens see that offenders are properly punished. While deferred prosecution arrangements transparently imposed on corporate offenders might provide one expedient option, there is a risk that smaller financial penalties may be viewed simply as an “economic cost” by those involved in corruption. In the eyes of the public, and many of our delegates, lengthy terms of imprisonment for individual offenders might be a more appropriate deterrent.

7. The impact of corruption perception indices on organizational reputations and public confidence was also the subject of a very interesting discussion throughout the Symposium. An analysis of the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index gave us some insight into why perceptions are important but do not always reflect reality, and why public education is so important.

8. That theme continued yesterday morning, in the Second Plenary Session. We looked at how the promotion of high standards of integrity, in both the public and private sectors, is essential when establishing the ethical values needed for good corporate governance. We were shown an inspiring example of how one company took ownership of the threat of a global corruption scandal, and used it as a catalyst to completely redefine its whole corporate culture. It was important to note how this change enhanced the sustainability of the business and had a knock-on effect in raising standards of compliance across the industry concerned. The value of a good organizational reputation cannot be underestimated.

9. In the Third Session, we focused on the important role that the ordinary citizen plays in combating corruption and overseeing the work of our various agencies. Answering the public demand for transparency and accountability was rightly recognized as an important precursor to the “conversation” we must have with the public. While the traditional media has always shone some light on corruption, the potential for exposing the true extent of this crime has increased exponentially with the advent of social media. We were given some invaluable advice on how to make the most of this unprecedented opportunity by fully involving a rightly inquisitive population.

10. This morning we learnt more about recent developments in China and how a resolute commitment to the cause is crucial. The tone from the top has been firmly set and it is the familiar mantra of zero tolerance for those involved in corruption, from the lowest to the highest, wherever they may be hiding. We also shared our views on the value and importance of international collaboration in the ongoing fight against corruption.

11. There was a timely reminder of the progress made, and the challenges still to be faced, in the implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).

12. In the Fourth Plenary Session, we examined how a global impact can only be achieved with global cooperation. Over the years there has been a consistent call for greater international cooperation, and closer coordination between jurisdictions in the use of mutual assistance, extradition and joint investigations. Let us each take home some ideas and recommendations that have come out of our deliberations, and consider for ourselves, individually and jointly, what we can do to take this forward.

13. If we are to consider this Symposium successful, let us remind ourselves that success is reflected in tangible results, which can only be observed after taking positive action towards our ultimate aim.

14. May I once again sincerely thank all the speakers and panel chairpersons for their contributions which, I think we can all agree, were invaluable. May I also thank our visiting delegates for spending time with the Hong Kong ICAC over the past two and half days. To those who have come from afar, please enjoy the remainder of your stay in Hong Kong and have a safe journey home. Perhaps I can leave you all with one final thought.

15. Over the last 40 years, Hong Kong has transformed itself from a society in which corruption was a way of life, into one which is generally regarded as “clean”. If there is one thing that the Hong Kong experience teaches us, it is that dedicated professionals, supported by the right political will and public trust, and working under the rule of law, can, and do, make a difference. We can rid ourselves and the communities we serve of the corrupt public and corporate regimes and practices that cause suffering to so many ordinary people. We **can** achieve that worthy goal, and I hope the shared experience of this Symposium will inspire us to redouble our efforts to do so.

16. And with that I now declare this 6th ICAC Symposium closed.

Thank you.

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