

Closing Address by Mr Y M WOO
Commissioner of ICAC, HKSAR
The 8th ICAC Symposium
(24 May 2024)

Good morning, ladies, gentlemen, friends and colleagues.

As this 8th Symposium draws to a close, please allow me to briefly reflect on what we have shared and learnt over the past few days.

2. Since I welcomed you all on Wednesday, international cooperation has emerged as the major theme binding all of us together. This spirit of sharing and cooperation was clear throughout the symposium, and I am delighted that we could celebrate the occasion of our 50th anniversary with so many friends, old and new.

3. During the keynote speeches, we heard how the rule of law and effective legislation are the key elements of any anti-corruption strategy. Strong powers might be necessary to deal with the threat of corruption, but there must also be checks and balances to maintain the rights and freedoms of the individual.

4. At the First Plenary Session, we heard from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and various speakers about the initiatives being pursued worldwide in support of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). Our speakers highlighted past successes but reminded us that we still have much to do for a sustainable future. They encouraged us to build and leverage partnerships across all forums, with a view to fostering better cooperation and more informal sharing of information. Another key theme was the increasing use of technology, which provides an opportunity to enhance and expedite the exchange of information vital to combating corruption.

5. In the Second Plenary Session, we were given a stark reminder of the challenges we face. In particular, we learnt how systemic

corruption and a compromised judiciary can cause public distrust and undermine the whole anti-corruption regime. There was much to learn, especially for young organisations that are just setting out on their own anti-corruption voyages. Increasing complexity, the use of digital technologies and the cross-border nature of corruption are three of the most pressing issues. Our speakers highlighted the need for anti-corruption agencies to collaborate, innovate and adapt to meet these challenges.

6. The theme of our Third Plenary Session was public-private partnerships. The speakers encouraged us to seek out new strategies and new partnerships, and to consider collective action with the private sector. Working together with regulatory bodies and those who monitor compliance functions in financial institutions offer ready-made opportunities for cooperation.

7. In the Fourth Plenary Session this morning, the next generation shared their vision for the future. From the story of one young officer's personal anti-corruption journey to the importance of instilling a culture of integrity at an early age, it was clear that we cannot underestimate the power of youth. This generation are not the leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders of today. In their hands, the future is one of opportunity and innovation, and we should look to empower them wherever we can.

8. Once again, I sincerely thank all the speakers and panel chairs for their invaluable contributions. I express my heartfelt appreciation to all of the visiting delegates for spending time with the ICAC over the past two and a half days. I also place on record my gratitude to the International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities (IAACA) for co-hosting this Symposium, which also serves as the 11th Annual Conference of IAACA. As I mentioned in my welcome address, IAACA will take this precious opportunity to re-affirm the collective commitment of its members by adopting the "Hong Kong Declaration on Strengthening International Cooperation in Preventing and Fighting Corruption".

9. Through the declaration, we express our appreciation for the achievements made under the presidencies of China and Qatar, and call upon anti-corruption authorities to utilize the UNCAC to enhance collaboration in the prevention of and fight against corruption, and the recovery of assets. We recognize our role in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and welcome international initiatives such as the UNODC's GlobE Network and GRACE. We emphasise the importance of adopting digital and financial forensics to tackle the increasing complexity of corruption, and recognize that for our work to be effective we need independence, a secure environment and reliable measurement of corruption. IAACA is privileged to have the partnership of the UNODC, and the devoted efforts of our executive committee and the wider membership of the Association to fulfil our mandates.

10. IAACA members, ladies and gentlemen, I hereby announce the adoption of the Hong Kong Declaration. Let us continue to stand united in our mission to eliminate corruption and uphold the principles in the UNCAC.

11. To conclude, let me say that Hong Kong's story in the fight against corruption should give us all confidence and belief in our mission. Let us re-affirm our commitment to the shared vision of a world that is free from corruption. Together, we are better. Together, we are stronger. Together, we can chart a new path to combat corruption.

12. Thank you all for being here. To those who have come from afar, please enjoy the remainder of your stay in Hong Kong and I wish you all a safe journey home. Thank you.