

SHA's speech at opening ceremony of ELIA Leadership Symposium (English only)

The following is the welcome address by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, at the opening ceremony of the European League of Institutes of the Arts International Leadership Symposium today (December 4):

Sir Michael, Ms Delfos, Professor Leung, Professor Thompson, Honourable Consuls-General, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the European League of Institutes of the Arts International Leadership Symposium. I understand that the symposium was held in Los Angeles and London in 2003 and 2005 respectively. I am delighted to see the event hosted in Hong Kong, for the first time in Asia, this year, particularly on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The symposium provides an interactive forum for leaders of the arts and cultural sector to deliberate on issues relating to cultural management and arts education. With the exchange of ideas among delegates from arts and design institutions all over the world, participants of the symposium will be able to deepen their understanding of the challenges facing arts education institutions today and come up with new perspectives, solutions and strategies to meet these challenges.

The theme "Building Cultural Software" of this year's symposium is most timely. The Hong Kong Government is striving to enhance our investment in the development of culture and the arts. We fully appreciate the importance of arts and culture in any modern city. It enriches the quality of life of its people. It also enhances social harmony and cohesiveness. Culture and the arts is an integral part of the competitive strengths of a knowledge-based economy. It is a magnet to attract and retain investment and talent. It plays an essential role in fostering the growth of creative industries. Investment in arts and culture brings a wealth of intangible values and benefits, which cannot and should not be evaluated solely by economic returns.

The Hong Kong Government has recently announced our plan to develop the West Kowloon Cultural District project. The project is an important strategic investment in culture and the arts for the future of Hong Kong. Our objective is to

develop an integrated arts and cultural district, with world-class facilities, distinguished talent, iconic architecture, quality programmes and vibrant public open space with a must-visit appeal to local and overseas visitors. We intend to build 15 different performing arts facilities suitable for different art forms. We shall also be developing a new and forward-looking institution with museum functions but much more, to be called Museum+. We shall also have a new exhibition centre mainly for arts-related events.

The success of a world-class arts and cultural district, and indeed the essence of any city, depends not only on the hardware, but also the timely development of its cultural software. Cultural software is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. In particular, it covers community participation and appreciation of the arts. We have been working hard on strengthening cultural software in Hong Kong which includes strengthening support for arts groups, nurturing of artistic talent, and enhancing arts education. It is high time that we invite cultural policy-makers and leaders of renowned arts institutions from all over the world to share their experience and wisdom in cultural management and arts education with us. We welcome international experts to give us their invaluable advice. We also look forward to more cultural exchanges similar to this international symposium to give us new insights, stimulate positive inspirations and generate impacts on the arts and cultural developments in Hong Kong.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts for the successful staging of the symposium in Hong Kong. May I wish all of you a very stimulating and fruitful symposium. Thank you.

Ends/Tuesday, December 4, 2007