

**Speech by The Honourable Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma  
at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Dinner of the  
Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong  
24 November 2019, Hong Kong**

1. Vice-Chancellor, Dean of the Faculty of Law, distinguished guests, alumni of the Faculty of Law, students, ladies and gentlemen. It is of course a great honour for me to say a few words tonight. I begin by offering my heartiest congratulations to the Faculty of Law on its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. I salute to particular the teaching staff, all the teachers of the University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law, both past and present and indeed the future.

2. In June last year, I had the honour of saying a few words at the Faculty of Law 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Kick Off Ceremony which took place at the University. Then, I stressed the importance of the community being cohesive as

opposed to being divisive. It is our responsibility as lawyers and members of the community to ensure this.

3. I also made this point at the Kick Off Ceremony. It is true that the Faculty of Law is now one of the very top law schools in the world, probably the top law school in Asia, at least the top two. The alumni of the Faculty of Law have risen to the top of their professions and this includes not only the legal profession and the Judiciary, but also in academic circles. However, for me, the ultimate achievement of a faculty, indeed of a university and any educational establishment, is the ability of its graduates and its students to contribute meaningfully to the community. This I believe to be the true measure of success and whether the reputation of an institution is truly merited.

4. The most tangible (indeed the most obvious) contribution that the Faculty of Law has made in the last 50 years, is obviously to the development of the law and the legal system in Hong Kong.

5. Our legal system is based on the common law. This is the system of law that has sustained Hong Kong through the years and has undoubtedly contributed to Hong Kong's success. So much so that it was expressly preserved under the Basic Law as one of the institutions that was to be maintained after 1 July 1997. I have no doubt it will continue to do so.

6. The common law is not just about the content of legal principles: the law of commerce, real property, criminal law, public law and so on. It is about fundamentals and the fundamentals of the common law define the legal system and the administration of justice in any society.

7. In our community, our legal system rests on fundamental principles and features such as equality before the law, the determination of disputes strictly in accordance with the law, the presumption of innocence, the guarantee of a fair trial and above all, the independence of the Judiciary. These and others are all features of the common law and it is important to understand that they are guaranteed and spelt out in the clearest of terms in the Basic Law. The Basic Law, as I constantly remind, reflects the implementation of the basic policies of the People's Republic of China regarding Hong Kong.

8. So when I hear commentaries – and there are many – about the outcome of cases before the courts or about our legal system, in order to test the validity of the views which are expressed, I turn to basics and those basics are

largely contained in the Basic Law and in the common law. All this would be obvious to any law student and certainly should be to any lawyer, and if anyone were to ask you to explain how the law and the legal system works in Hong Kong or to explain the outcome of cases which go before the courts, a good and obvious starting point is to look at the Basic Law, see what it means and identify just what is its spirit.

9. This approach to the common law and its operation in our community in the past 50 years has real relevance to those who serve the community. All this is celebrated in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Faculty of Law and the achievements of the Faculty are manifested by at least the following points:-

(1) First, Hong Kong has a sophisticated, skillful and world class legal profession, comparable to the very best in any other jurisdiction in the world.

(2) Secondly, Hong Kong has a respected and independent Judiciary. I can say that from my own experiences that Hong Kong is regarded as a very much a part of the common law world and enjoys considerable support and admiration from our counterparts in many jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand (from which our Non-Permanent Judges in the Court of Final Appeal come), not to mention the USA, Singapore and so on.

10. The most important achievement of the Faculty, however, must be the inculcation of a sense of the rule of law

in our community. Many people may not be able to articulate its features fully, but most in Hong Kong understand it to be essential.

11. Those who have benefitted from the Faculty of Law over the course of the past 50 years are in a position better than most to understand what the rule of law means. It is, ultimately a simple concept of knowing right from wrong, of mutual respect, fairness and of course equality before the law.

12. I have now mentioned the word “community” many times tonight, and deliberately so because it is worth all our efforts to preserve our sense of community, notwithstanding frustrations which may surface from time to time.

13. I once again congratulate the Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong on this significant milestone and

hope it will continue, as all of us hope to do ourselves, to do the right thing.

14. Thank you all and please enjoy the evening.

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