



**SPEECH OF MR. RODEN TONG
PRESIDENT OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF HONG KONG
AT THE OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2026
19 JANUARY 2026**

Good afternoon, Chief Justice, Secretary for Justice, Chairman of the Bar, Members of the Judiciary, Members of the Legal Profession, Distinguished Guests, both local and overseas, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Last year at the Opening of the Legal Year, I spoke of a new era for our city and our profession – an era that calls on us to educate, to think big, to uphold our independence, to inspire and to nurture talent. This year, I return to the same journey with a sharper focus: Professionalism – the lodestar that sustains public confidence, strengthens institutions, and enables Hong Kong to serve as a trusted bridge between China and the world.

Professionalism – The Foundation We Stand On

2. Professionalism begins with fidelity to our constitutional order and the rule of law, which includes judicial independence, due process, equality before the law, and reasoned adjudication. Under “One Country, Two Systems”, Hong Kong remains China’s only common law jurisdiction and the world’s truly English-Chinese bilingual common law community. This is not just a dual heritage; it is our competitive edge, reflected in advocacy, cross-border transactions, dispute resolution, and the translation of complex standards across systems.

3. Hong Kong’s legal profession is recognised globally for its exacting standards and unwavering commitment to the rule of law and judicial independence. The Basic Law

protects these bedrock principles, with Article 85 enshrining judicial independence to ensure cases are decided by law, evidence and proper procedure.

4. As President of the Law Society, I am proud that, for over a century, we have safeguarded professional standards through admission, practice regulation, and discipline, while nurturing talent and advancing access to justice, thereby sustaining public trust in our courts and outcomes.

Professionalism – A Public Service and a Public Trust

5. The practice of law is not merely a business; it is a public service rooted in the community's trust that justice will prevail.
6. Our judges deserve our highest respect for their unwavering, selfless commitment to adjudicate strictly in accordance with law, undeterred by unfounded criticism or external pressure. Day after day, they carry demanding caseloads, write carefully reasoned judgments, and uphold due process with impartiality and integrity. Rather than the executive or legislative branches, courts bear the ultimate responsibility for deciding cases according to law and proper procedure; that responsibility is discharged by judges who consistently put duty above self.
7. As legal professionals, we must remember that the practice of law is a public service. Professionalism, manifested in integrity, objectivity, diligence, and respect, sustains the community's confidence in the administration of justice. Public service, not profit, defines our profession.

Exemplifying Professionalism – Case Law and Standards

8. Professionalism is not merely an aspiration; it is a concrete standard, upheld by law and regulatory bodies. The Law Society's statutory role is to oversee the conduct of law firms and solicitors, maintaining the highest standards through rigorous admission, practice and disciplinary processes.

9. In the judgment of *A Solicitor v The Law Society of Hong Kong*¹, the Court of Appeal reaffirmed Sir Thomas Bingham MR’s formulation in *Bolton v Law Society*² that lawyers must discharge their duties with “*integrity, probity and complete trustworthiness*”, and failures in these respects may warrant severe sanctions to protect the public and preserve confidence in the profession. The judgment emphasised that sanctions serve not as punishment, but to protect the public and uphold the profession’s reputation, which outweighs individual interests.
10. This case clearly underscores that professionalism and integrity are not optional. They are foundational to public trust and to the rule of law.

Professionalism at Our Most Challenging Times – Leading and Supporting the Community

11. History teaches us that the true measure of a profession is revealed not in moments of ease, but in times of adversity. When our city faces uncertainty, when our institutions are tested, and when the rule of law is challenged, the public expects the legal profession to step forward, to lead, to defend, and to inspire confidence.
12. In the heartbreaking Tai Po fire at Wang Fuk Court last November, the Law Society mobilised at once: launching an Emergency Free Legal Helpline where volunteer solicitors provided guidance on personal injuries, wills and probate, insurance, civil litigation, and building management. We also set up on-site service counters across districts, enabling face-to-face support for families navigating loss and uncertainty. The quiet reliability of our members, including many young practitioners, exemplified professionalism under pressure.
13. During our visit and tribute to the affected at the site, we witnessed citizens from all corners of Hong Kong queuing in solidarity, paying their respects with dignity and order, which was profoundly moving. It is a testament to the compassion and resilience that define our city. The orderly seeking of assistance by the unfortunate ones and the

¹ *A Solicitor v The Law Society of Hong Kong* (CACV182/2014)

² *Bolton v Law Society* [1994] 1WLR 512

systemic support of the community strongly reflect that, in times of adversity, the rule of law is the genuine safeguard of our society.

14. Moments like these remind us: In the most challenging times, professionalism ensures the role of the legal profession is enshrined, so that law is not only argued in courtrooms but also brings clarity, support and hope to communities in need.

Professionalism and the National Call to Deepen Reform

15. Our nation is embarking on a new chapter. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) deliberated and adopted the *Recommendations for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan* (the “Recommendations”), setting strategic plans for our country’s development over the next five years, including important plans to support Hong Kong’s development, painting a brighter future for our city.
16. Under the Recommendations, Hong Kong’s strategic position has been defined: to consolidate and enhance our status as an international financial, shipping, and trade centre, and to build an international innovation and technology centre. Our city is specifically called on to better leverage its role as a two-way opening bridge, fully strengthening its function as “super connector” and “super value-adder”, so that it shall become a major channel and hub for attracting external resources and a key platform for Chinese Mainland enterprises to go global, thereby assisting the country’s high-level opening up.
17. This strategic vision aligns with commentary that urges Hong Kong to proactively connect with the 15th Five-Year Plan, embracing a “hub + engine” role: connecting domestic and international markets, empowering innovation, and serving national modernisation with new quality productive forces, ranging from green finance and digital trade to smarter professional services.
18. For our legal profession, professionalism ensures reforms are grounded in clear drafting, precise interpretation, and impartial administration. By upholding these standards, we reinforce institutional trust and sustain Hong Kong’s role as a beacon of legal excellence

and a bridge between systems, contributing to the high-quality development envisioned in the Fourth Plenary Session's recommendations for Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability.

Preparedness and Responsible Innovation – Systems that Earn Trust

19. Professionalism also means preparedness: building resilient systems that protect the public, enable commerce, and responsibly harness technology.
20. For over 35 years, our Professional Indemnity Scheme (PIS) has safeguarded both the profession and the public; together with a robust anti-money laundering regulatory regime, we have proven the credibility of self-regulation that is essential to independence of the profession and the rule of law.
21. The Law Society has prepared for LawTech and AI with foresight: as early as 2009, we introduced principles in the *Hong Kong Solicitors' Guide to Professional Conduct* to govern the use of technology by solicitors, ensuring compliance with legal and ethical requirements. In 2024, we published a *Position Paper on the Impact of AI on the Legal Profession*, highlighting the need for timely and proactive measures to guide AI adoption for the benefit of our profession and the public. Most recently, we launched a brand new mobile application in last December, which represents a significant leap forward in member engagement by offering a consolidated platform of features and services. Together, these initiatives reflect responsible innovation anchored in professional standards.

Professionalism and Hong Kong's Global Standing

22. While yearly indicators may shift, the long arc shows Hong Kong's legal system remains robust. The World Justice Project's Index places Hong Kong high regionally, and strong in absence of corruption and regulatory enforcement, reflecting the integrity in our systems and the diligence in our practice. These are not statistics to rest upon, but standards to surpass.

23. As reforms advance and international ties deepen, professionalism will remain the currency that keeps trust high in courtrooms, in boardrooms, and across borders.

Closing – A Milestone to Share and Let’s Hold Fast to the Privilege

24. As I draw this address to a close, it is my distinct honour to announce that the Law Society will soon embark on a new and momentous chapter with the opening of our new office premises in the second quarter of this year. Founded in 1907, the Law Society has walked alongside Hong Kong for 119 years, steadfastly committed to serving the public good and upholding the highest ideals of professionalism. In our long history, we have acquired our own premises only twice: first in 1998, when our membership numbered around 4,500, and now, as we prepare to serve over 13,500 dedicated professionals. This relocation is not merely a change of address, but a reflection of our collective journey, our growth, and our enduring responsibility to the community. It is a humble milestone, reminding us that our true purpose lies in serving alongside Hong Kong, supporting its people, and advancing the rule of law for the benefit of all.
25. Let us remember: professionalism is both our privilege and responsibility. It is how we sustain respect for our judges whose selfless professionalism fortifies the rule of law, how we dignify our clients, and how we preserve trust of the public; it is also how Hong Kong’s common law tradition contributes to China’s modernisation, advancing reform through law, with integrity and confidence.

May I wish you all a happy new year and good health. Thank you.