

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT



It has been a great honour for me to take over as President of The Law Society and I am sincerely grateful for the trust that members have placed in me.

During the short span of seven months since my inauguration in May, I have focused my efforts on members' care including exploring more opportunities for members to develop their businesses and expand their practice areas, strengthening the bond among members through various activities and enhancing the public image and visibility of the profession by adopting a more proactive role in international and community events.

### **Create business opportunities**

The legal services market is becoming increasingly competitive. An important task of The Law Society as the professional body of solicitors is to explore more business opportunities for its members.

The call for an extension of solicitors' higher rights of audience has been made for a long time. Our efforts finally came to fruition with the gazette of the *Legal Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2009* in June extending rights of audience before the High Court and the Court of Final Appeal to eligible solicitors.

To the public, this extension gives them a wider choice of advocates. To solicitors, it expands the scope of legal services that solicitors can provide to the public. Those solicitors who are interested in and good at court advocacy can enjoy the flexibility of appearing before the higher courts.

Apart from developing new practice areas locally, assisting members to reach out to other markets has also been on the top of our task list. A lot of activities have been organised creating networking opportunities for practitioners overseas and in Greater China. Many memorable activities were organised during the year. They included, among others, the 16th Commonwealth Law Conference in April in which more than 670 lawyers from the common law jurisdictions came to Hong Kong for the event and the Cross Strait Four Regions Lawyers Summit in October in which nearly 200 lawyers from the Mainland, Taiwan, Macau and Hong Kong attended. There were also numerous visits to and from lawyers associations in the Pearl River Delta Region and across the Mainland.

## President's Report

In addition, The Law Society has established a convenient framework for members to explore expansion of their practices to the emerging markets in Eastern Europe through the establishment of the Czech Interest Group. Efforts have also been made to tap into the markets in Russia and Vietnam which are most likely to be coming to Hong Kong for fund raising activities.

### Care for members

The Law Society exists for its members and the welfare of members is thus our prime concern. Correctly identifying the needs of members is important. During the past year, The Law Society has paid visits to 68 law firms selected at random to collect members' views.

The economy is still recovering from the financial crash. To alleviate the financial pressure on members, The Law Society has waived the membership fee for 2009. Further, a total of 430 CPD and RME courses were organised by The Law Society or through the Academy of Law free of charge during the year. Other methods are being explored to further assist members in saving their overhead.

More sports and recreation groups with subsidised facilities have been organised for members. As at the end of 2009, there were a total of 20 sports and recreation groups and over 600 members participated in the activities during the year.

### Reaching out

Law students and trainees are the future pillars of the legal profession. As President, I have been invited to numerous gatherings organised by law schools and student organisations where I have had very good opportunities to share experiences and introduce to them the work of the profession and The Law Society.

The Law Society's Young Solicitors' Group ("YSG") regularly organises Friday lunch gatherings where Council and Committee members meet with young lawyers in an informal social setting to foster a closer link with them. The YSG also participated in public dragon boat races with its own team and organised special community projects like the "Say No To Drugs" project in 2009.

Apart from reaching out to our future leaders of the profession, I have also focused much effort in connecting with the public aiming to raise the profile of The Law Society and enhance the public image of the legal profession.

With the adoption of a spokesman policy by The Law Society and the logistic support provided by the Director of Communications on a daily basis, I and my colleagues were able to respond quickly to media enquiries on topics of interest to the public. The conduct of public seminars (for example, talks during the Law Week and the Anti Money Laundering Publicity Campaign), the organisation of mentorship schemes (in conjunction with the Path Builder Mentorship Scheme) and the mobilisation of volunteer help to the needy (for example, the pro bono legal advice to personal injury victims through the Personal Injury Helpline) have drawn our profession closer to the community.

## President's Report

### Monitor law and practice reforms

The Law Society monitors the development of legal reforms. It serves to reflect the views of members and mobilize support whenever necessary to protect the interest of the profession.

The Law Society has been working hard on the proposed introduction of limited liability partnerships (“LLPs”). LLPs address the concern associated with general partnerships over the risk of innocent partners having unlimited liability for the consequences of the negligence of other partners in the same firm. For the past year, meetings with the Department of Justice and LegCo were held to push forward the proposal. A lot of work has also been done to gather support from other public bodies like the Consumer Council for the introduction of LLPs. Once LLPs are introduced, more solicitors are expected to expand their operation by forming larger partnerships with partners who possess expertise in different practice areas.

Another area that The Law Society has focused its efforts on is the improvement of the criminal legal aid system. Our campaign has resulted in the Government's commitment to increase its expenditure on assigned-out criminal legal aid cases by more than 100% from HK\$90 million to HK\$190 million and to include additional items in the new fee structure like reading fee, preparation fee, conference fee and court hearing day fee instead of an all-inclusive statutory brief fee at fixed levels to cover all pre-trial preparation and the first day of court hearing.

Further, after 20 years of deliberation, the Government suddenly proposed fundamental changes to the “daylight conversion mechanism” in the Land Titles Ordinance. Our members who have been following closely on the development did not consider that those changes would serve any useful purpose except to cause further delay in the introduction of the land registration system. The Law Society thus organized an extensive publicity campaign including holding public forums and meetings with stakeholders and legislators. We finally succeeded in persuading the Government to drop those changes.

I have not lost sight of the importance of self-regulation to the profession. The regulatory role of The Law Society serves to maintain public trust in the profession. Initiatives to streamline the complaints handling procedures in the area of professional conduct and discipline have been under constant review by The Law Society.

There is still a lot to achieve for the profession and I look forward to the challenges ahead.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Council for their support, the Secretariat for their dedication and assistance, and all those 400 or more members who have selflessly given their time to share their experience and knowledge through their participation in the work of The Law Society committees and events.

**Huen Wong**  
*President*