

**The Chief Justice's Speech
at the HKU Law Alumni Reunion Dinner (27 November 2009)**

I am greatly honoured to be invited to this dinner to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Faculty of Law. As Henry VIII said to each of his wives in turn: "I shall not keep you long".

I am delighted to see so many of you. The body of alumni is a most important stakeholder of a Law School and can provide it with invaluable support. You have received so much from the Law School. I am glad to see that you have been providing strong support to the development of your Alma Mater and I am sure you will continue to do so.

This occasion marking four decades of the Law School is an important and meaningful event. It is a time for reflection on the past and a time to look forward with commitment to the exciting challenges in the future.

As to the past: The Law School has built up a formidable reputation as a leading law school. It is able to attract top students and very good staff. Its teaching and research are of the highest quality. Its graduates form the backbone of the Judiciary and all sectors of the legal profession. Many occupy leadership positions. I wish to express my warmest congratulations to all concerned, professors, and graduates, for what you have achieved. And there is every reason for all concerned to be very proud of these fine achievements over the past four decades.

As to the future, many exciting challenges lie ahead, including: The great project of the new Law Building on the Centenary Campus, the implementation of new programmes and curriculum changes.

I am sure that in your curriculum students are taught that just as Judges evolve the common law, they have also developed a coded common language. For example, in appellate courts: when Judges says that they have exhaustively researched the authorities, this only means that they have read the skeleton submissions. When they say that the trial Judge's findings could have been better or more clearly expressed, what they have in mind is that the trial Judge was a twit who made a mess of the trial. When they put a point to counsel beginning with "with

great respect”, what they really mean is that they consider counsel’s submissions to be nonsense. And when they use the phrase “with the greatest respect”, that means that counsel’s submissions are considered to be “absolute nonsense”.

We live in a fast changing and globalised world. The only certainty is uncertainty and the only security is the ability to cope with insecurity. It is salutary to note that: I had started my working life some two decades before the present generations of graduates were even born. And by the time they reach my stage of life, we will be approaching the year 2050, the middle of the 21st century.

In order to prepare the students for this rapidly changing world, the Law School will no doubt teach them all the necessary skills, including analytical and communication skills, which they would have to apply in changing times and circumstances.

But above all, I believe that it is of fundamental importance that: the students acquire a deep appreciation of the values that underlie our legal system. and they understand that the practice of law is an honourable profession, with its deep commitment to the rule of law.

We live in a highly materialistic world, with some people measuring human worth by how much one earns and spends. But legal professionals should not be obsessed with material possessions. I hope your graduates will remember that as has been well said, we make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give. Your graduates must be prepared to do their fair share to serve and contribute to the welfare of our society. Ultimately, our society must find its soul in its social conscience, based on respect for human dignity.

The rule of law is an immutable cornerstone of our society. Ultimately, the rule of law depends on the dedication and commitment of lawyers. And lawyers are what the Law Schools make them. This Law School therefore has a vital responsibility. I am confident that under the able leadership of your Dean, this Law School: will progress from strength to strength and will continue to meet the high and rising expectations of our community.

I wish the Law School all the very best in its future endeavours.