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**Subcommittee on the Two Orders Made under Section 49(1A) of the  
Inland Revenue Ordinance and Gazetted on 13 May 2016**

**Background Brief**

**Purpose**

This paper sets out background information on the two Orders made under section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112) ("IRO") and gazetted on 13 May 2016 (L.N. 61 and L.N. 62) to implement the Comprehensive Agreements for Avoidance of Double Taxation ("CDTAs"). The paper also summarizes the views and concerns expressed by Members when the relevant subject of CDTAs was discussed by the committees of the Legislative Council ("LegCo").

**Background**

Comprehensive Agreements for Avoidance of Double Taxation

2. Double taxation refers to the imposition of comparable taxes in more than one tax jurisdiction in respect of the same taxable income. The international community generally recognizes that double taxation hinders the exchange of goods and services, movements of capital, technology and human resources, and poses an obstacle to the development of economic relations between economies. As a business facilitation initiative, it is the Government's policy to enter into CDTAs with Hong Kong's trading and investment partners.

3. Hong Kong adopts the territorial basis of taxation whereby only income sourced from Hong Kong is subject to tax. A local resident's income derived from sources outside Hong Kong will not be taxed in Hong Kong and hence will not be subject to double taxation. Double taxation may occur where a foreign jurisdiction taxes its own residents' income derived from Hong Kong. Although many jurisdictions do provide their residents with unilateral tax relief for the Hong Kong tax they paid on income derived therefrom, the existence of a CDTA will provide enhanced certainty and stability in respect of the

elimination of double taxation. Besides, the tax relief provided under a CDTA may exceed the level provided unilaterally by a tax jurisdiction.

#### Article on exchange of information

4. A CDTA would normally include an article that provides for the exchange of information ("EoI") necessary for the carrying out of the agreement between the two contracting parties. To enable Hong Kong to adopt the international standard for EoI under CDTAs, i.e. the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ("OECD") 2004 version of EoI Article, the Administration introduced the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2009 into LegCo on 29 June 2009. The Bill was passed on 6 January 2010, and the Inland Revenue (Amendment) Ordinance 2010 came into operation on 12 March 2010.

5. The 2004 version of the OECD EoI Article categorically states that the lack of domestic tax interest does not constitute a valid reason for refusing to collect and supply the information requested by another contracting party. Before enactment of the Inland Revenue (Amendment) Ordinance 2010, the Inland Revenue Department ("IRD") could only collect taxpayers' information for the ascertainment of liability, responsibility and obligation under the domestic tax law. In other words, IRD could not collect any tax information unless such information was for domestic tax purposes. This constraint had reduced the number of Hong Kong's potential CDTA partners, and restricted the progress of the negotiations for CDTAs. Upon the commencement of the Inland Revenue (Amendment) Ordinance 2010, IRD is authorized, among other things, to collect information concerning tax of a foreign territory for the purpose of EoI under a CDTA, and supply such information to the other contracting party of a CDTA.

#### **Previous orders made under section 49(1A) of IRO**

6. A list of jurisdictions which have entered into CDTAs with Hong Kong as at 30 April 2016 is in **Appendix I**. Since the enactment of the Inland Revenue (Amendment) Ordinance 2010, the Chief Executive in Council has made a total of 30 orders (excluding L.N. 61 and L.N. 62 of 2016) under section 49(1A) of IRO to give effect to CDTAs signed or upgraded based on the 2004 version of the OECD EoI Article.

#### **The two Orders gazetted on 13 May 2016**

7. L.N. 61 and L.N. 62 are made by the Chief Executive in Council under section 49(1A) of IRO to give effect to the CDTAs signed between Hong Kong

and Romania and the Russian Federation respectively. The two Orders will come into operation on 29 July 2016. The salient features of the two CDTAs are summarized in paragraphs 13 and 14 of LegCo Brief (File Ref: TsyB R 183/800-1-1/9/0 (C)), and paragraphs 4 to 6 of the relevant Legal Service Division Report (LC Paper No. LS53/15-16).

### **Concerns and views expressed by Members**

8. Subcommittees have been formed to study some of the previous orders made under section 49(1A) of IRO. The major issues studied by these subcommittees include progress of the Administration's approach and strategy adopted for the negotiation of CDTAs as well as consultation with the local community and relevant stakeholders on the negotiations, financial and economic implications of CDTAs, scope of taxes covered by the CDTAs, adequacy of safeguards under the respective EoI Articles to protect taxpayers' right to privacy and confidentiality of the tax information exchanged, the procedures for handling EoI requests under CDTAs, the mutual agreement procedure in the CDTAs, determination of the resident status of a taxpayer under the CDTAs, and the approach to bring the CDTAs into force.

9. The advice given by the Administration on the general or policy issues during the deliberations of the subcommittees is summarized in **Appendix II**.

### **Latest development**

10. At the House Committee meeting on 20 May 2016, Members agreed to form a subcommittee to study the two Orders.

### **Relevant papers**

11. A list of relevant papers is in **Appendix III**.

**List of Jurisdictions with which Hong Kong has entered into CDTAs**  
(as at 30.4.2016)

	<b>Jurisdictions</b>	<b>Date of Signing (month and year)</b>
1.	Belgium	December 2003
2.	Thailand	September 2005
3.	Mainland China	August 2006
4.	Luxembourg	November 2007
5.	Vietnam	December 2008
6.	Brunei	March 2010
7.	The Netherlands	March 2010
8.	Indonesia	March 2010
9.	Hungary	May 2010
10.	Kuwait	May 2010
11.	Austria	May 2010
12.	The United Kingdom	June 2010
13.	Ireland	June 2010
14.	Liechtenstein	August 2010
15.	France	October 2010
16.	Japan	November 2010
17.	New Zealand	December 2010
18.	Portugal	March 2011
19.	Spain	April 2011
20.	The Czech Republic	June 2011
21.	Switzerland	October 2011
22.	Malta	November 2011
23.	Jersey	February 2012
24.	Malaysia	April 2012
25.	Mexico	June 2012
26.	Canada	November 2012
27.	Italy	January 2013
28.	Guernsey	April 2013
29.	Qatar	May 2013

	<b>Jurisdictions</b>	<b>Date of Signing (month and year)</b>
30.	Korea	July 2014*
31.	South Africa	October 2014
32.	United Arab Emirates	December 2014
33.	Romania	November 2015*
34.	Russia	January 2016*
35.	Latvia	April 2016*

\*Not yet entered into force

(Source: Annex F of the LegCo Brief ref. TsyB R 183/800-1-1/9/0 (C) issued on 11 May 2016.)

### **Summary of the advice given by the Administration on general or policy issues during the deliberations of the relevant subcommittees**

#### Approach and strategy for the negotiation work

The Government's strategy in negotiating CDTAs is that Hong Kong would attempt first to conclude a CDTA with an identified country in each major region, such as the northern Asian region, the Asian Pacific Region, Europe and the Middle East, so that other countries in the same region would make reference to that CDTA and be more prepared to negotiate a CDTA with Hong Kong.

#### Consultation with the local community

2. The Administration would bear in mind the need to assure the overall interests of Hong Kong, pay heed to the views of local stakeholders on tax issues of their concern and ensure that Hong Kong's residents and enterprises would benefit from such agreements. The Administration would step up efforts in soliciting views from the relevant sectors for the CDTA negotiations.

#### Financial and economic implications

3. The impact of the CDTAs on Hong Kong's loss of Government revenue would be minimal since Hong Kong adopts the territorial basis of taxation whereby only income sourced from Hong Kong was subject to tax. There is no precise information with regard to the extent of benefits that would be gained by Hong Kong enterprises and residents under the CDTAs, because the enterprises and residents would not provide such information to the Government unless they have to provide such information to IRD in seeking taxation relief.

#### Scope of taxes covered by CDTAs

4. The taxes covered by CDTAs are "income taxes" and "capital taxes" (as appropriate) in the broad sense. In each CDTA, there is an Article on "Taxes Covered" and the provisions therein specify the types of taxes to which the Agreement should apply. Owing to the special nature of the activities of entertainers and sportsmen, there is a separate article in the CDTAs that provides for the tax arrangement for the income of the entertainers and sportsmen who are residents of either Contracting Party derived from their activities exercised in such capacities in the other contracting party. While the Administration would make the best endeavour to attain the most favourable

terms for Hong Kong residents in CDTAs for the avoidance of double taxation and other tax measures (including reduction in caps on withholding taxes imposed by other contracting parties), the outcome of negotiation would hinge on other factors, especially the taxation policies of other tax jurisdictions.

#### Privacy protection and confidentiality safeguards in the EoI Article

5. Based on the OECD model text for CDTAs, oversight bodies of tax authorities of the contracting parties are allowed access to the tax information exchanged. However, during the scrutiny of the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2009, in view of the concern of the Bills Committee, the Administration undertook to seek to confine disclosure of information to the tax authorities but not their oversight bodies when negotiating individual CDTAs.

6. In the negotiation process, Hong Kong would attempt to include express provisions in the CDTAs, as far as possible, to forbid automatic and/or spontaneous exchange of information. The inclusion of such provisions would depend on the stance of the particular treaty partner. The Administration would explain the legal requirements of the Rules to the treaty partners, and provide them with copies of the Rules during the course of negotiation.

7. The provision "[i]nformation shall not be disclosed to any third jurisdiction for any purpose" in the respective EoI Article of certain CDTAs is binding on and must be observed by the Contracting Parties (including their authorities, such as courts and administrative bodies), and obligations under this provision are not affected by other bilateral agreements in place such as agreements for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters with third jurisdictions.

#### Procedures for handling EoI requests under CDTAs

8. Before acceding to an EoI request from a contracting party, IRD will examine whether the request is foreseeably relevant to the carrying out of the CDTA or to the administration and enforcement of the contracting party's local tax laws, and consider carefully the supporting evidence and facts of proof provided by the contracting party. Moreover, when gathering information from the subject persons or relevant third parties who hold the relevant information or documents under the EoI request, IRD will consider their objections, if any, to the disclosure of the information to the contracting party.

9. To gather information, IRD will issue a formal notice to the information holder requesting for the relevant information or documents. If the information holder has the need to know the name of the requesting treaty partner (e.g. claiming privilege against self-incrimination), IRD is prepared to

take a pragmatic approach to deal with the situation after striking a balance between the international standard and information holder's need. Specifically, where the information holder has reasonable grounds to know the name of the requesting treaty partner, IRD would seek prior consent of the requesting treaty partner before disclosure of the name. If the requesting treaty partner declines to give any consent, IRD will inform the information holder accordingly. If the information holder refuses to provide the information requested as the name of the requesting treaty partner is not known, IRD will, having considered the circumstances of the case, decline the disclosure request for reason that it could not disclose to the information holder the name of the requesting treaty partner, which is considered necessary to facilitate the gathering of the requested information.

#### Mutual agreement procedure

10. The provisions for arbitration were added to the OECD Model Tax Convention in 2008, and Hong Kong would be prepared to include provisions for arbitration in negotiating for a CDTA. Without the arbitration provisions, it is theoretically possible that a case remains unresolved for an indefinite period if it cannot be settled by mutual agreement between the contracting parties.

#### Definition of "resident"

11. In all the CDTAs Hong Kong has entered into, paragraph 1 of the Article on "Resident" provides the definition of the term "resident of a Contracting Party" for the purposes of the respective Agreements. Where by reason of the provisions of paragraph 1 of the Article an individual was a resident of both contracting parties, the status of the resident would be determined according to the criteria set out in paragraph 2 of the Article. If based on those criteria the status of the individual remains unresolved, the matter would have to be settled through mutual agreement of the Contracting Parties. The mutual agreement procedure is transparent and the subject person would be informed of, amongst others, the scope of information to be provided by IRD to the tax jurisdiction concerned for resolving the resident status. It would also be unlikely for IRD to withhold from other tax jurisdictions any information presented by the subject person.

#### Approach of bringing CDTAs into force

12. The Entry Into Force Article of CDTAs contains provisions as to what procedures are required for a CDTA to enter into force and in which assessment year the tax arrangements set out in a CDTA will become effective. Upon the entry into force of a CDTA, IRD will publish an announcement on its website for public information. IRD will also actively send emails to tax practitioners



and registered foreign and local business associations upon the entry into force of a CDTA. In addition, IRD will update its Departmental Interpretation and Practice Notes as appropriate. With the knowledge of a CDTA through a relevant Order published in the Gazette, residents of the contracting parties would make arrangements for their activities with a view to reaping tax benefits when the tax arrangements of the CDTA become effective. No complaints or objections regarding such approach have been received from the public.

## List of relevant papers

Date	Event	Papers/Minutes of meeting
6 January 2010	The Legislative Council ("LegCo") passed the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2009	<a href="#">Report of the Bills Committee</a> (LC Paper No. CB(1)755/09-10)  <a href="#">Sample Exchange of Information Article</a> (LC Paper No. CB(1)106/09-10 (02))
8 October 2010	The Subcommittee on the three Inland Revenue (Double Taxation Relief and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income) Orders gazetted on 2 July 2010 submitted its report to the House Committee	<a href="#">Report</a> (LC Paper No. CB(1)2975/09-10)
12 November 2010	The Subcommittee on the Five Orders Made under Section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and Gazetted on 15 October 2010 submitted its report to the House Committee (one of the Orders was the Mainland Third Protocol signed between Hong Kong and the Mainland)	<a href="#">Report</a> (LC Paper No. CB(1)390/10-11)
24 June 2011	The Subcommittee on Five Orders Made under Section 49 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and Gazetted on 13 May 2011 submitted its report to the House Committee	<a href="#">Report</a> (LC Paper No. CB(1)2552/10-11)

Date	Event	Papers/Minutes of meeting
16 December 2011	The Subcommittee on the Three Orders Made under Section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and Gazetted on 18 November 2011 submitted its report to the House Committee	<a href="#">Report</a> (LC Paper No. CB(1)753/11-12)
23 May 2012	The three orders made under section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and gazetted on 18 May 2012 were introduced into the Legislative Council	Legislative Council Brief: <a href="#">Order on Malta</a> <a href="#">Order on the State of Kuwait</a> <a href="#">Order on Switzerland</a>  <a href="#">Legal Service Division Report</a> (LC Paper No. LS65/11-12)
24 October 2012	The two orders made under section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and gazetted on 19 October 2012 were introduced into the Legislative Council	Legislative Council Brief: <a href="#">Order on Malaysia</a> <a href="#">Order on United Mexican States</a>  <a href="#">Legal Service Division Report</a> (LC Paper No. LS5/12-13)
8 May 2013	The three orders made under section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and gazetted on 3 May 2013 were introduced into the Legislative Council	Legislative Council Brief: <a href="#">Order on Canada</a> <a href="#">Order on Jersey</a> <a href="#">Order on the Republic of Austria</a>  <a href="#">Legal Service Division Report</a> (LC Paper No. LS52/12-13)
20 November 2013	The Subcommittee on the Three Orders Made under Section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and Gazetted on 4 October 2013 submitted its report to the House Committee	<a href="#">Report</a> (LC Paper No. CB(1)350/13-14)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Papers/Minutes of meeting</b>
27 November 2014	The Subcommittee on the Two Orders Made under Sections 49 and 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and Gazetted on 17 October 2014 submitted its report to the House Committee	<u>Report</u> (LC Paper No. CB(1)290/14-15)
30 October 2015	The Subcommittee on Specification of Arrangements (The Mainland of China) (Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income) (Fourth Protocol) Order	<u>Report</u> (LC Paper No. CB(1)70/15-16)
18 May 2016	Two orders made under section 49(1A) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and gazetted on 13 May 2016 were introduced into LegCo	Content of the subsidiary legislation <u>1</u> and <u>2</u> (L.N. 61 and L.N. 62 of 2016)  <u>Legislative Council Brief</u> (File Ref: TsyB R 183/800-1-1/9/0 (C))  <u>Legal Service Division Report</u> (LC Paper No. LS53/15-16)