

HKAF Statement to Legco on WKCD on 23 Oct 2007

Arts and cultural activity are increasingly recognised by many city governments as having an important role in establishing a positive image and a high value branding for the city whose name it carries. The Hong Kong Arts Festival welcomes the proposed increase in the inventory of arts facilities to be provided in the WKCD for three reasons:

1. This will help alleviate the pressure on existing performance venues and thereby allow the Hong Kong Arts Festival to do more
2. The new venues will help to accelerate development of the cultural sector
3. The new development will be a boost to Hong Kong's competitive advantage in the region and on a global basis.

On the first point, the Hong Kong Arts Festival has a strong reputation globally, and remains one of the most respected festivals in the region; and it has the potential to do much more in contributing to Hong Kong's regional and international reputation as an exciting, cosmopolitan Asian city. However, it is constrained by the number of top quality venues available to the entire community.

In an increasingly globalised world, few leading institutions exist exclusively to serve a local population. The international audience for the Edinburgh Festival, for example, is about 60%, and should be higher for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The resulting economic benefit is estimated to be GBP 268m, employment of 2500, according to an independent report of May 2006, jointly commissioned by the Edinburgh City Council, Event Scotland, the Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Executive. The report goes on to list 14 recommendations to sustain and support the pre-eminent status of Edinburgh's Festivals, one of which was the continual development of performing venues.

With the additional venues of WKCD, the Hong Kong Arts Festival will be able to plan for an increase in total audienceship to include a significant proportion of non-residents who will add to Hong Kong's tourism and other related earnings. In this way, the Hong Kong Arts Festival can more effectively contribute to Hong Kong's global and regional positioning. However, this cannot be achieved in isolation and must be supported by an integrated plan to promote Hong Kong, including strong support in international and regional promotion.

On the second point, there are certain venues in which the top performers of the world seek to perform. For example, orchestras will make important compromises in order to play at the Concertgebouw, both for its prestige and for its excellent sound. This is the kind of position to which the WKCD should aspire, not only to provide the best conditions in which Hong Kong's own artists can work, but also to attract the best from around the world in order to a) confirm Hong Kong's leadership position, b) to stimulate and inspire our own artists and c) develop an informed audience whose appreciation will be honed through consistent exposure to top international talent. This audience will in turn help to raise the level of work produced and presented locally, in a virtuous cycle of continued improvement.

On the third point, Hong Kong is a leading Asian city in many ways, but is falling behind other urban centres in the region in arts infrastructure. Outside greater China, Singapore and Seoul have made impressive strides. Shanghai, Beijing, Macau and Shenshen all have impressive new performance venues. Hong Kong needs to catch up. This is an investment in the city's image and competitive advantage, in its ability to attract talent and develop knowledge based creative industries.

The interests of entertainment and tourism and business sectors are not always regarded as being aligned with those of the arts community. However, in the development of WKCD, these do come together in a shared interest in enhancing Hong Kong as whole.

I hope that these comments are helpful. The Hong Kong Arts Festival will be happy to play an active role in further discussion and development; including providing detailed input into facility planning and operational matters as the project moves from planning to blue print.