

Chairman's Report for 2025

1. 2025 passed in the blink of an eye.

Some of the Developments in 2025

2. On an encouraging note, our members welcomed the re-appointment of Justice Ribeiro P.J. and the appointment of Sir William Young as an overseas Non-Permanent Judge to our Court of Final Appeal. It is to the considerable benefit of Hong Kong and its people that the current arrangement, which has been in place since 1st July 1997, continues.
3. 2025 also saw the amendment to the Prison Rules, the passing of the subsidiary legislation under the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO) and the voting down of the Registration of Same-sex Partnerships Bill. The Bar has voiced, and will continue to voice, its observations and concerns on matters relating to the rule of law and the administration of justice by suitable means.
4. Access to justice is important. This includes both the right to legal advice and representation, which is constitutionally protected, as well as access to legal advice for those in our community who cannot afford it.
5. It is apparent from recent events that, notwithstanding our legal aid regime, many are left in the lurch. After some planning, our Bar Free Legal Service Scheme has given way to a more flexible model where our members can

more easily provide pro bono legal advice without the intervention of solicitors, with the assistance of some NGOs. In the short period of time since the revamp, more than 350 members have already signed up. More will be done in that regard in the coming year.

6. A Taskforce on the law reform options, led by Deputy Honorary Secretary Martin Wong, was set up after the Tai Po Wang Fuk Court blaze to help contribute the professional views of our members.

Growth of our Bar and the Bar's Engagement with the International Legal Community

7. In terms of growth of the Bar, the total number of admissions was stable, at 84 (as of the end of November last year). Our total membership which is 1,758 strong is fast approaching 1,800 (as we have 88 pupils) and should reach that level in the course of this year. The continued growth of the Bar and the inner Bar has not dented the number of applications for ad hoc admissions. A total of 15 applications were made (versus 19 in 2024), of which 11 were civil cases. The Bar, which considers these applications from the perspective of public interest, consented to 13.
8. It is to the advantage of Hong Kong that our Courts are provided with the assistance they require for the resolution of disputes and also the development of our jurisprudence. In a period sometimes marked by tense international relations, it is desirable for Hong Kong, which is rightly known to be a common law jurisdiction with a high degree of internationalism, to

have lawyers of the highest standing appear in our Courts and see first-hand how our system operates.

9. On the same topic, the members of the Council and some of our sub-committees have continued to engage with the international legal community. We participated in events organised by various Bars for the opening of their legal year, as well as forums and conferences organised by the International Bar Association, Law Asia, The Presidents of Law Associations in ASIA (POLA), amongst others. These enabled our members to learn about how other professions face their own domestic challenges, which are often not dissimilar across jurisdictions, and allowed us to share in person the latest developments in Hong Kong.
10. This year, we also hosted our first collaboration with the World Justice Project conference here in Hong Kong on the theme of fighting corruption, with the participation of some of our Judges, practitioners and also academics. The Young Barristers Committee also hosted its third international conference here, focusing on crypto assets and art. These allow our friends from around the world to visit us in Hong Kong.
11. It is important, in particular for our next generation, to be and feel part of the wider international legal community. Lawyers around the world share the same values and often learn to deal with similar challenges. If we are to thrive as a common law jurisdiction within the “One Country, Two Systems” framework, we must continue to work hard to maintain and develop our international links with other jurisdictions.

Mainland Engagement

12. With the support of many members, our annual delegation to Beijing was concluded last month. The visit, following the Bar's tradition and values, facilitated in-depth exchanges with the mainland stakeholders on legal matters of mutual concern from a legal professional's perspective.
13. Similar to earlier years, we have received a large number of delegations from various organisations, whether government or professional, in Hong Kong. This has continued to allow us to explain the role of an independent Bar as a self-regulated legal profession, as well as important principles relating to the administration of justice and the rule of law in Hong Kong.
14. Our courses with Peking University and East China University of Political Science have grown from strength to strength. Our members also assisted with training for mainland legal practitioners in the provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu as well as in Hong Kong with the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy and the Ministry of Justice. There is demand for advocates in arbitrations conducted in and outside Hong Kong. As independent self-employed advocates, our members are well-placed to take advantage of such growth.

Administration

15. Supply-side economists are known for saying that supply creates its own demand. As our Secretariat has become more modern and adept in the 21st century, we have relied on it more to accomplish our mission.

16. The reality is that as the Bar has grown in numbers and the matters which we deal with have become more complex, much demand has been placed on the time of our administration, ably led by Bonnie Chiu, our Director of Administration and Development. Her working hours are on par with US investment bankers. More importantly, she truly understands the values and the expectations which both our members and the public have of the Bar. We are indebted to her and the Secretariat's staff, who have poured their hearts into serving the Bar. I would also wish to thank Amy Lee, our long-standing Deputy Director, for her unwavering dedication and loyalty to the Bar.

17. We have been and will continue to invest in hardware, software and information technology. This is inevitable for us if we are to continue to properly discharge our duties as a self-regulated profession.

Council Members

18. I would of course wish to thank Martin Hui SC and Eva Sit SC, who have served as co-Vice-Chairmen and have very kindly agreed to continue serving in the coming year. They have spent many hundreds of hours on Council

matters. Like all the chairpersons before me, I have realised how the task would be simply impossible without the support, advice and encouragement of fellow office bearers. Martin Wong will be stepping up as our Honorary Secretary, having served as Eugene Yim's deputy. He is multilingual, tech-savvy and a well-rounded renaissance man who we can count on.

19. We bid farewell to Derek Chan SC and Eugene.
20. Derek had served the maximum 3 terms as Vice-Chairman when Victor Dawes SC was Chairman and agreed to stay on for one more term to facilitate the transition. Between his practice and other public commitments, he has always found the time to share his wisdom and to cheer us on.
21. Eugene has served with dedication for an almost impossible combined 6 years as our deputy and later Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. I can attest that he has put his heart and soul into the service of the Bar. Derek and Eugene's good humour and wisdom will be deeply missed, but I know the Bar can always count on them.
22. I would also like to thank all the members who have supported the Bar in the last year. As my predecessor Victor noted, it is important and natural that our members will have different opinions on many matters. What unites us is our undiluted belief in the rule of law, the independence of the Bar and judicial independence, amongst other things.

23. In *Skyfall*, M (played by Dame Judi Dench) said, “I’ll be damned if I’m going to leave the department in worse shape than I found it.” This is our collective challenge. I know that all of our members, in their own ways and to the best of their abilities, will contribute to preserving our profession and our system.

20 January 2026

José Antonio Maurellet SC

Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association