

**Speech by the Hon Mrs Selina Chow Liang Shuk-Yee, GBS, JP
Motion Debate on Developing Eco-tourism, 8 May 2002**

Selina Chow:

Madam President, first of all, I would like to declare that I am the Chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), though this does not involve any personal or pecuniary interests.

Eco-tourism has become a trend in the development of global tourism industry and I strongly support the idea of promoting Hong Kong green tourism products among tourists. I also support this motion.

Eco-tourism and hiking have always been some of the popular activities among tourists. They ranked fourth and ninth respectively among the 10 most popular feature tourism activities. 24% of the tourists expressed an interest in the Eco-tourism activities of Hong Kong, and this represents an increase of more than 100% as compared to the 11% in 2000. Furthermore, about 15% of the tourists visiting Hong Kong are interested in hiking in the countrysides of Hong Kong and this has increased by 2% as compared to that of 2000.

In fact, the scenery of many hiking trails in Hong Kong is very beautiful and those trails are also very popular among tourists. Moreover, Hong Kong has a special advantage over other cities and places, and that is, tourists only have to spend 20 to 30 minutes travelling from the bustling city to the green and lush countryside to enjoy leisure and peace.

Every year, more than 1500 members of the media from the Mainland and other different countries and regions come to Hong Kong on study tours. Green tourism products, such as guided hiking trips along the beautiful trails of Hong Kong, are usually included in their itineraries, so that they could personally experience and report on Hong Kong's advantage in this area.

Last month, the AXN 2002 Challenge was held in Hong Kong and athletes from various countries in Asia and Hong Kong competed against each other at the Tai Tam Country Park. Interesting episodes of this competition can be viewed at the AXN channel next month. This programme will also serve to further promote the green tourism and Eco-tourism products of Hong Kong.

The tourism industry also fully supports and promotes the countryside hiking tourism activities of Hong Kong. In Tokyo, Japan alone, nine tourist agencies have offered specially featured hiking tours, and one of such first time tours — the Hong Kong five days hiking tour organized

by the Nippon Yusen Travel Services, was even granted a prize under Japan's Tour of the Year Award.

Back in October 1999, the HKTB worked in co-operation with the then Agriculture and Fisheries Department to co-ordinate the work of publishing a guidebook "Exploring Hong Kong's Countryside" in three languages namely, Chinese, English and Japanese. This guidebook, which is excellent in both pictures and language, presents the hiking trails, flora and fauna as well as natural scenery of Hong Kong to readers. The guidebook can be said to be rather comprehensive for it describes hiking spots all over the Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and New Territories.

Furthermore, the HKTB also published a pamphlet entitled "Hong Kong Walks" introducing three green hiking trails on Lamma Island, the Peak and Tai Tam Reservoir, so that tourists could explore scenic spots with different special features in Hong Kong.

The world-renowned Mai Po Marshes and Chinese white dolphins are also very popular among tourists. Many tourists are particularly interested in this area and they would make special trips to Hong Kong to watch a variety of rare species birds and very cute pink dolphins that haunt the waters of Hong Kong. The Ocean Park is also an important element of Hong Kong's green tourism products. Since its inception in 1977, this theme park has been providing the three-in-one services of education, entertainment and conservation.

Looking into the future, Hong Kong should really continue to explore all types of green tourism products, such as hiking trails, Sai Kung islands tours, and so on, to give tourists a chance to appreciate the special features and natural landscapes of these islands and coastlines. We also hope that the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department could register certain Hong Kong hiking trails as the recognized routes of relevant international organizations so that tourists who have an ardent love for hiking could do two things simultaneously during their visits to Hong Kong, killing two birds with one stone, so to speak, for on one hand, they could accumulate hiking mileage and on the other, they could also see for themselves the abundant green resources of Hong Kong. Hong Kong should also continue to promote green and eco-tourism in the source markets of our tourists and the local tourism industry and offer advices in relation to itineraries, related packages and promotional support, so as to encourage tour operators to organize green tours or eco-tours to attract tourists to Hong Kong.

Madam President, the promotion and development of tourism require the support of the Government and the participation of the business sector because the design of special featured new itineraries would require the co-operation of various parties. For example, related government departments should provide additional supporting services, including cleansing services for country parks, installation of public toilets, map

boards, road signs, and so on. At the same time, the authorities must also educate the public on the importance of environmental protection in improving the environment of Hong Kong and in attracting overseas tourists. The tourism sector could then research on and develop a new green tourism route while enhancing the knowledge of front-line staff in the areas of the natural ecology and safety codes of the countryside. I hope that with the combined efforts of various parties, Hong Kong could have more green tourism products to cater for the needs of different tourists and to lay a good foundation for the further development of green tourism.