

Closing Address

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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The Millennium Factor

I am delighted to be here again at the conclusion of the Housing Authority's 1999 Housing Conference on "Better Homes in the Next Millennium". The new millennium has had such a major publicity build-up in Hong Kong and throughout the world that some cynical voices are starting to question whether we are not all over-playing the millennium concept. Some people have pointed out that the full 2000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ will not, in theory, have passed until 1st January 2001; others have said that Jesus Christ was not born in 1AD but probably some years before that. Yet others deprecate the proliferation of events using the millennium as an excuse or symbol for business gatherings, profit-making or any kind of extravagant celebration.

Yet there is no escaping that the new millennium is coming, and with this all its symbolic importance. Like New Year's Day, but on a greater scale, it symbolises for all of us a dividing line and break with the past. Pope John Paul II, (in his Epistolic Letter "Tertio Millennio Adveniente",) is the first to have recognised in 1994 the significance of preparing for the year 2000. Since then, the new millennium has been widely associated with a change of traditional life styles, brought about by technological progress in general and information technology in particular. Not only in technology, but in science, Government policies, literature, and so on, the millennium is proving to be instrumental in promoting re-valuation and re-thinking.

Success of the Housing Conference

And so it should be for housing too as it is one of the most important political and social issues facing Governments at the turn of the millennium. This conference could not have been held at a more appropriate time. The intellectual enthusiasm of contributors and participants in the past two days is evidence that the "millennium effect" has stimulated creative thought in the housing field. The diversity of presentations and addresses made has been striking, with distinguished contributions from participants coming from Hong Kong, the Mainland of China and the international community. Much of the credit for the success of this conference belongs to participants as well as the organisers, and I congratulated all of you.

Housing Policy in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, we are poised at an excellent moment to take advantage of this international exchange of ideas and concepts. It is less than two and a half years since Hong Kong was reunited with China under the "One Country, Two Systems" formula. Since reunification, we have done very well. Housing has been one of the Government's highest priorities. The first major policy document issued by the new Government was the White Paper on Long Term Housing Strategy, published last year. This represents the results of a very thorough stock-taking of the many successes and occasional failures of housing policies, and provides us with a foundation on which we have reformed the key elements of our housing strategy, and we can now move forward to develop new measures to meet our "millennium aspirations".

The Challenges ahead

It is clear that many of the future challenges faced by Governments including yours, are concerned with meeting the **increasing aspirations** of growing populations. On the other hand, we must also be cautious and realistic about standards and costs. This is particularly true of the **environment**, where we need a strategy which allows for maximisation of housing production without compromising the quality of our urban way of life. This requires **imaginative and innovative approaches to building design** as well as more **flexible and imaginative town planning**. It is also a good opportunity for all of us to **reassess the respective roles of the public and the private sectors** in the provision of housing.

Conclusion

All in all, I feel this conference has been a fascinating and practical experience for all participants, including us in Hong Kong. I am sure that you will return home to consider at greater length

how the insights gained over the last two days will help you in the formulation of your own housing strategies as the new millennium dawns.

Thank you.

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