The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was set up in 1974 to tackle corruption, marking a milestone in Hong Kong’s anti-corruption history.

**Anti-Corruption Work Before 1974:** As early as 1898, bribery was made an offence with the enactment of the Misdemeanours Punishment Ordinance. Replaced by the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance in 1948, the legislation was enforced by the Anti-Corruption Office of the Police Force. In May 1971, the Ordinance was further strengthened with new offences, heavier penalties and stronger investigative powers to become the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance of today.

In June 1973, a police chief superintendent fled Hong Kong while under investigation by the Anti-Corruption Office. The then Governor, Lord Murray MacLehose, appointed a Commission of Inquiry to look into the circumstances of the case, advise on the effectiveness of the anti-corruption law and suggest possible amendments. In response to the findings of the Commission of Inquiry and prevailing public opinion, the Governor set up an independent organisation to tackle corruption, heralding a new era in the fight against corruption.

**The Birth of the ICAC:** The ICAC was established on February 15, 1974, with the enactment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Ordinance. The Commission is independent of the civil service and the Commissioner is answerable directly to the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The ICAC is committed to fighting corruption through a three-pronged strategy of effective law enforcement, prevention and education to maintain Hong Kong’s reputation as a clean and fair society.

The ICAC comprises three functional departments: Operations, Corruption Prevention and Community Relations. As at the end of 2019, the Commission had an establishment of 1,501 posts.

The work of the ICAC is closely scrutinised by four independent committees comprising leading citizens as members and non-officials as chairmen. The Advisory Committee on Corruption advises on Commission-wide policies and issues. The Operations Review Committee examines and monitors all ICAC investigations. The Corruption Prevention Advisory Committee oversees the work in enhancing practices and procedures to minimise opportunities for corruption. The Citizens Advisory Committee on Community Relations advises on measures to foster public support in combating corruption and educate the public against the evils of corruption.

An independent ICAC Complaints Committee examines complaints against the ICAC or its staff, monitors the handling of complaints and advises on follow-up actions.

**Operations:** The Operations Department is the investigative arm of the Commission. The department is responsible for receiving, considering and investigating reports of alleged offences under the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance, the Independent Commission Against Corruption Ordinance and the Elections (Corrupt and Illegal Conduct) Ordinance.

Investigating officers are empowered to make arrests for alleged offences covered by the above three ordinances.

The Department of Justice examines evidence gathered by the Operations department and advises on prosecutions. The consent of the Secretary for Justice is necessary before any prosecution for an offence under Part II of the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance can be instituted.

**Complaints:** The ICAC receives corruption complaints through its 24-hour report centre and hotline (2526 6366) as well as its Regional Offices in various districts. In 2019, there were 2,297 complaints (excluding elections), of which 738 were pursuable. Among those complaints, 1,480 (64 per cent) concerned the private sector, while 647 (28 per cent) related to government departments and 170 (7 per cent) involved public bodies. In 2019, 72 per cent of the complainants who reported corruption were willing to reveal their identities.

Reports that are found to relate to crimes outside the purview of the ICAC are referred to the Police or other law enforcement agencies. Reports that are found not to involve criminality, but disclose inappropriate conduct or systems considered conducive to corruption may be referred to relevant government departments for consideration of disciplinary or administrative actions or other relevant organisations for appropriate follow-up actions. Where identified, individual complainants’ consent is sought for such referrals.

In 2019, a total of 623 election-related complaints were received, of which 517 (or 83 per cent) concerned the 2019 District Council Election, and 73 (or 12 per cent) concerned the 2019 Rural Representative Election. Out of the 623 complaints, 590 were pursuable.

**Investigations and Prosecutions:** A total of 157 persons in 90 cases, including election-related cases, were prosecuted in 2019. Among those prosecutions completed in 2019, 107 persons were convicted, resulting in a person-based conviction rate of 75 per cent and a case-based conviction rate of 79 per cent. By the end of 2019, the overall caseload stood at 1,749, including 547 election-related cases. A total of 129 persons in 68 cases were pending legal proceedings.

**Corruption Prevention:** The Commissioner has a statutory duty to examine the practices and procedures of government departments and public bodies and secure the revision of methods of work or procedures which may be conducive to corrupt practices. The Commissioner is also required by law to provide corruption prevention assistance on request to any member of the public. These duties are discharged by the Corruption Prevention Department.

The department conducts detailed studies of practices and procedures of public organisations, and assists them in the effective implementation of corruption prevention measures. Up to the end of 2019, 4,006 reports of these studies had been issued, of which 70 were completed within the year, covering areas such as law enforcement, public procurement, public works projects, funding schemes and licensing regulatory systems. The department also provides timely consultation service to government departments and public bodies on corruption prevention concerning new legislations, policies, public services, and major projects.

Corruption prevention advice is available to the private sector upon request. In 2019, private organisations were advised on 737 occasions. Since its establishment in 1985,
the department’s Corruption Prevention Advisory Service (formerly known as Advisory Services Group) has advised private organisations ranging from small companies to large corporations and listed companies on measures to prevent corruption through good governance, internal control and capacity building. The confidential and free consultation service can be obtained through the department’s hotline (2526 6363). In addition, the Corruption Prevention Advisory Service Web Portal (https://cpas.icac.hk) provides handy online knowledge and resources for corruption prevention.

The department also produces user-friendly corruption prevention guides to help both public and private sector organisations enhance their governance and internal control systems in areas such as procurement, staff administration and building maintenance.

**Community Relations:** The Community Relations Department (CRD) is responsible for educating the public against the evils of corruption and enlisting community support in the fight against corruption. ICAC’s 2019 annual opinion survey conducted by an independent research agency showed that 96 per cent of respondents expressed their support for the ICAC and almost all respondents considered a corruption-free society was important to the overall development of Hong Kong. The survey also continued to reflect the public’s high intolerance of corruption.

The CRD adopts an “Ethics for All” approach to disseminate anti-corruption messages to the community through face-to-face liaison, multimedia publicity and partnership with various sectors.

A clean civil service is one of the pillars for the success of Hong Kong. CRD provides regular integrity training to government officers of all ranks and also strives to enhance ethical leadership training for senior civil servants and public officials. Under the Ethical Leadership Programme, the CRD collaborates with the Civil Service Bureau to foster a probity culture in the civil service through a network of 160 Ethics Officers from all government bureaux and departments. The CRD also launched a new Integrity Management e-learning Platform for Civil Servants in 2020 to enhance their understanding on anti-corruption laws.

To sustain a level-playing field in Hong Kong, the CRD established the Hong Kong Business Ethics Development Centre in 1995 to promote business ethics as the first line of defence against corruption. The Centre’s work is steered by the Hong Kong Business Ethics Development Advisory Committee which comprises 10 major chambers of commerce in Hong Kong. To fortify the business sector’s resistance to bribery, the CRD conducts anti-corruption talks and seminars for different trades, industries, professional bodies and business organisations.

In collaboration with the Insurance Authority and 12 industry bodies, the Centre launched a two-year “Integrity for Success” Ethics Promotion Campaign for the Insurance Industry in 2019. Under the Campaign, a series of guided tours to specific spots in various districts to enhance the public’s understanding of Hong Kong’s anti-corruption programme which commenced in 2015, the CRD launched its new initiatives in 2019/20 to reinforce the core value of integrity in Hong Kong. The CRD and its partners also proactively disseminated anti-corruption messages and cultivating a probity culture to people of diverse race and new arrivals through promotion of a multi-language publicity package featuring an animation video. In addition, the CRD continues to offer tailor-made services and assist them in adopting ethical management measures.

The CRD also commenced a Multi-media “Youth-for-Youth” Co-creation Project in 2019 to enhance the engagement of young people in the anti-corruption cause. A series of online programmes are being developed through engaging young people to contribute their creative ideas and expertise in multi-media production.

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**International and Mainland Liaison:** The ICAC continues to collaborate with and assist anti-corruption agencies of States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption to build up their anti-corruption capacity. It also sustains efforts to promote Hong Kong’s anti-corruption achievements and its clean business environment to the international community through visits and exchanges with international organisations, as well as online publicity via the dedicated “International Perspective” section on the ICAC corporate website. In partnership with the Guangdong and Macao counterparts under the framework of the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, it has commenced a new page to promote probity culture in the region.