

Honorary Doctor of Business Administration

Mr David HARILELA

Citation written and delivered by Professor Matthew LEE Kwok-on

Mr Pro-Chancellor:

By all accounts, Mr David Harilela is a self-made man. In 1984, he arrived in South America with three suitcases of samples looking for buyers, where, with only a few simple Spanish phrases under his belt and a little help from a friendly hotel phone operator, he established contact with potential clients. His competitors had their own connections, but while they sat comfortably in their hotel rooms to wait for clients, he dragged his three suitcases to the clients' offices to show them the merchandise. In this way, he received more than HK\$11.7 million worth of orders in two months. He used the money to revive his family's flagging business.

In this and other similar endeavours, Mr Harilela echoes what his forefathers used to do throughout his family's history. The Harilelas are known for their verve and perseverance. His grandfather, Naraindas, came to Shanghai and then Guangzhou in the 1920s to set up a business exporting exquisite Chinese products. At first the business thrived, but then the Great Depression occurred and, like many other businesses at that time, it collapsed. However, the family stuck together. Before World War II, the Harilelas moved to Hong Kong to start anew. They first became a supplier of fresh fruit to the British army camps and then they started tailoring military uniforms. Mr Harilela's father and uncles then began to branch off into other business ventures, building the family fortune to the scale it is today.

Mr Harilela was born in Hong Kong where he received his primary and secondary education at Diocesan Boys' School. Later, he went to study business administration at the University of Southern California, US. He is now the CEO of the Harilela George Limited group of companies and Director of Hotel Holdings Limited. He is a Past Director and currently the Vice-Patron of The Community Chest of Hong Kong, the Founder and Trustee of the George and Chandra Harilela Foundation, and a Co-founder of the Indian Community Group.

Today, Mr Harilela is among the most well-known and respected members of one of the most prominent Indian families in Hong Kong. He has business interests in various industries such as real estate, hotels, trading, manufacturing, shipping and licensing. Mr Harilela is quick to acknowledge the love and support of his family. To him, his father George and his uncle Hari, who have given him guidance throughout his life, are respectively the bricks and mortar of the Harilela family. His siblings and cousins also occupy a prominent place in his heart for their unstinting support. The Harilela clan, numbering over 50, resides under the same roof, living proof of their solidarity.

Starting with their grandparents, the Harilelas have been known for their readiness to help the less fortunate. Stories of their generosity are passed down from generation to generation as goals to reach and standards to uphold. Mr Harilela is no different from his grandfather and father in this regard. He has kept up some of their most notable charity initiatives such as the Kanyan Daan Trust, which finances mass weddings for women in India who could not afford the expense of a dowry on their own, in addition to providing educational aids to young Indian women. He has also launched many projects of his own to bring relief to people who are in need of help. For example, the Cleft Lip and Palate Project in the Philippines makes it possible for many people to regain respect and confidence by means of plastic surgery, while the End Polio Campaign works towards removing the disease from the surface of the Earth within our lifetime. His position as the former Governor of the Rotary Clubs of District 3450 undoubtedly helps his philanthropic activities in no small degree, but in the end, it is his persistence and altruism that strike a responsive chord with others. Mr Harilela recalls with wonderment how generosity has a way of catching on. Many of his projects appear unattainable in the beginning, but by dint of his persuasiveness, Mr Harilela always succeeds in marshalling others to his aid.

Mr Harilela continues to look for ways to bring hope to the world. In 2011, to counteract the tendency to fixate on the negative, he initiated THE ONE, an international humanitarian award that seeks to acknowledge the unsung heroes of the world by means of a handsome monetary prize, with which they can further their selfless work to help others. Since its inception, THE ONE has honoured 17 such heroes, whose deeds would otherwise have remained unknown except to those who directly benefit. Eager to spread this positive message to Hong Kong, Mr Harilela has now established a similar award specifically for Hong Kong, THE ONE – HK. The

goal to draw attention to the positive remains the same, which Mr Harilela considers to have a particular urgency in present-day Hong Kong.

Mr Harilela is a man of many talents. He is known not just for being an avid businessman, but also a much-loved musician in the Hong Kong community. Not only does he enjoy singing for family and friends on special occasions, he also uses his talents to benefit a wide array of charities. He has performed several times to raise money for charities with pop groups such as the Beach Boys and Blondie at the FCC Ball and also twice on the Community Chest live TVB fundraising show. He has also sung for several other charities such as Lifeline Express, Project Orbis, Rotary, United Nations and Operation Smile.

Mr Harilela calls himself a “Chindian,” a name he uses to underscore his dual identity as an Indian and a Chinese. Although he maintains a close relationship with his relatives in India and elsewhere he considers himself as having no other home than Hong Kong, for which he continues to harbour hopes despite today’s trying circumstances. Hong Kong is undergoing drastic changes, but as changes take time, he counsels patience and hard work. He believes that talent and innovation are not in short supply, but they have to be channeled in the right direction so they can benefit Hong Kong.

Mr Pro-chancellor, as an established businessman, Mr David Harilela embodies the acuity, resilience, and industriousness of successful entrepreneurship. As an eminent philanthropist, he embodies the goodness that can be found in altruism. In recognition of his contributions both as a businessman and a philanthropist, I request City University of Hong Kong to confer upon him the Honorary Doctor of Business Administration.