

**Special Address by Secretary-General Prof. Teresa Cheng
At the Belt and Road Summit 2026**

10 September 2026, Hong Kong, China

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is a great pleasure to join you at the Belt and Road Summit. Every year, this Summit brings together governments, businesses and professionals from around the world for a very important purpose: dialogue. Not dialogue for its own sake, but dialogue that leads to mutual learning, to partnerships, and to projects that improve the lives of ordinary people. In a world that people too often talk past each other, this Summit stands as a reminder of what can be achieved when we talk and listen to each other.

I am delighted to note that friends of the International Organization for Mediation (IOMed) are present at this Summit in numbers. Just now we have heard the insights of Mr. Jam Kamal Khan, Federal Minister for Commerce of Pakistan. Pakistan is a Founding Member and Contracting State of IOMed, and has been a strong supporter of this organization from the very beginning.

I notice also the participation of senior leaders from IOMed member states, including Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, and Deputy Prime Minister of Laos who signed the IOMed Convention on behalf of his country, as well as ministers from Kazakhstan and Timor-Leste.

The presence of so many IOMed member states at this Summit is no coincidence. It is testament to the convergence between IOMed's objectives and the advancement of Belt and Road cooperation.

I know not all of you here are familiar with IOMed. So, let me tell you what IOMed is, what we have achieved as a young international organization approaching its first anniversary, and how IOMed is relevant to cooperation under the Belt and Road cooperation.

First, **what is IOMed?**

The short answer is: we are the first treaty-based intergovernmental organization in the world dedicated exclusively to mediation, with its headquarters based in Hong Kong.

For decades, the international community has set up institutions for litigation and arbitration based on conventions — the ICJ, the PCA, and ICSID — but none devoted solely to mediation, although Article 33 of the UN Charter lists mediation among the very first means of peaceful settlement. Mediation was left ad hoc, arranged case by case. IOMed fills that institutional gap. We do not overtake or supersede these established bodies, but we aim to offer disputants a credible and viable alternative.

IOMed administers mediation for three types of disputes: State-to-State disputes, international commercial disputes, and disputes between a national of a State and another State, for instance, investor-State disputes. As an international public good, our services are also available to non-member states and their companies.

IOMed is established through a consensus-based multilateral process, very much in the spirit of “extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits,” which is also a cherished principle of the Belt and Road Initiative. Our membership spans continents and legal traditions, and we are committed to building stronger mediation capacity for all of them.

Our mission is to promote peaceful settlement of international disputes and to develop friendly relations and cooperation among States through mediation, or in simpler terms: to promote mediation for peace and prosperity. Mediation resolves disputes without rupture and helps maintain peace — the critical foundation of development, and commerce therefore thrives where certainty and relationships are preserved.

Now, **what have we achieved in our first year?**

IOMed was inaugurated on 20 October 2025. On that day, we had 37 Signatory States and 8 Contracting States. Approaching our first anniversary, we now have 47 Signatory or Acceding States, including 16 Contracting States. All of them are participants in the Belt and Road

Initiative. Our case administration services have been engaged, and I am pleased to say there are success stories. The one I can share in public, with consent of the parties and the mediator, is a maritime dispute involving charter party chain between a Chinese party and a Singaporean party, resolved through IOMed-administered mediation earlier this year. Other cases are in the pipeline.

Beyond case work, we have been busy building the institution and the mediation ecosystem around it. We have conducted capacity-building activities for our member states. We plan to host “Dialogue with Mediators” series, where members of our Panels of Mediators share their experience and the latest trends in the field. We also are going to organize the IOMed Global Series, where renowned practitioners and officials will have intellectual exchanges on subjects related to international law, international relations and mediation. We are also exploring specialized panels for specific sectors, for example, commodities, aviation and maritime disputes. Where the need arises, we will provide such special panels. We have reached out extensively to international partners, because no organization, however determined and energetic, can build a global mediation culture alone.

Let me now turn to **how IOMed is relevant to cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.**

The Belt and Road Initiative promotes connectivity in five areas: policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people exchange. IOMed’s work contributes to each of these five connectivities.

On policy connectivity: the growing membership of IOMed is testament to the growing recognition of mediation’s value across the world. As more governments embrace mediation as a policy option, the mediation norms at national and international levels will gradually be connected and aligned. IOMed is well placed to help enhance that connectivity between laws, rules and best practices, which would further enhance the predictability and reliability of international mediation involving different jurisdictions.

On infrastructure, trade and finance connectivity: closer cooperation means more contracts, more transactions, but unfortunately, more disputes. When disputes arise, the question is not whether they can be avoided, but

how they are managed and resolved. Mediation allows parties to prevent escalation, and to reach amicable settlement at a fraction of the cost and in a fraction of the time of other traditional means of dispute resolution. Another use of mediation is to help surpass impasse during negotiations. We coin the phrase “deal mediation,” where the mediator bridges the gap and creates cooperation.

Mediation under IOMed is based on voluntariness and designed to be faster and more affordable, where parties have control over the process and outcomes. This is especially valuable for long-cycle infrastructure projects, where a protracted dispute can delay implementation for years and sour a partnership that took years to build. A dispute resolved in months, with the relationship intact, is far more valuable than a judgment won after years of litigation or arbitration.

On people-to-people connectivity: mediation’s value is perhaps the deepest in this regard. Mediation is about dialogue. It recognizes that disputes have cultural and human dimensions, not merely legal ones. It rebuilds trust, preserves long-term relationships between countries, companies and individuals, and replaces the zero-sum mentality with a win-win approach. There is no confrontation, but collaboration. No animosity, but amity. It is a skill and a culture that must be passed from person to person, which is why capacity building sits at the heart of our Organization: training young professionals and diplomats, and encouraging secondment and exchange. In that sense, the culture of mediation shares the same DNA as the Silk Road Spirit of peace, cooperation, openness, inclusiveness and mutual benefit.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you continue to explore cooperation at this Summit, whether in construction, financing, shipping, legal services, mining, aviation or AI, I wish to encourage all of you to insert mediation into your policies and business strategies. IOMed can be a lubricant for Belt and Road cooperation, so that disputes become bumps in the road rather than roadblocks.

As we look ahead, we will continue to strengthen capacity-building cooperation with international partners — training those who mediate and

raising awareness among those who may one day need mediation. We invite all of you to join us in the endeavor to foster a global mediation ecosystem, where amicable settlement is not the exception but the norm.

The Belt and Road connects economies and cultures through roads, ports and exchange programs. IOMed hopes to do our small part in connecting them by fostering understanding, preserving trust, and sustaining partnerships.

Thank you very much.