FIFTH CONGREGATION
DOCTOR OF LETTERS
honoris causa
Dr Helmut SOHREN

CITATION
Mr Chancellor,

It is a long way from Upper Austria, and the iron and steel producing town of Linz, the hometown of Dr Helmut SOHREN, whom we honour here today. But to Dr Sohmen, who describes himself as “an Austrian national but a citizen of the world”, physical distance is irrelevant. His career and other interests have taken him to many parts of the world, and this experience has given him an unrivalled global perspective on matters within his purview.

He studied law at the University of Vienna, and, as a Fulbright Scholar, political science at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. After taking his doctorate in Law in Vienna, he returned to the United States, where he graduated Master of Comparative Law from Southern Methodist University in Texas, and Master of Laws from Northwestern University.

He subsequently moved to Montreal, where he became the first in-house legal adviser to the international division of the Royal Bank of Canada, and was involved in projects as diverse as the establishment of the Monetary Authority of the Bahamas as well as the incorporation of local branches of the Royal Bank in Central and South America.

Despite the allure of a career with the Royal Bank, Dr Sohmen acceded to the request of his father-in-law, the legendary Y. K. Pao, to move to Hong Kong and join the family shipping business. In 1970, he became Director of World-Wide Shipping, one of the world’s largest privately owned bulk fleets. From 1974 to 1986, he supervised the group’s Bermuda, London and New York activities. In 1986, he took over as chairman of the shipping side of Y. K. Pao’s corporate empire. He also took on the Managing Directorship of Dragonair, which he led in the difficult start-up years, until 1989, when his family’s shareholding in the airline was sold.

Dr Sohmen has been widely involved in industry and community affairs in Hong Kong. He was instrumental in raising funds for the establishment of the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre, of which he became Deputy Chairman on its inauguration. In 1984, he was elected a Director of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, and currently serves the bank as non-executive Deputy Chairman.

Dr Sohmen was Chairman of the Hong Kong Shipowners’ Association from 1987 to 1989, and as the Association’s representative, he served on the Basic Law Consultative Committee from 1985 to 1990. From 1989
to 1991, he was Chairman of the Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce, the most prestigious post in the Hong Kong business world, and President of the Baltic and International Maritime Council, the world’s largest international shipping organisation, of which he remains Honorary President.

In 1985, Dr Sohmen was appointed to the Legislative Council, and in the same year became a member of the erstwhile Securities Commission and of the Economic Review Committee. Other senior appointments have included membership of the Civil Aviation Advisory Board, the Port Committee, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the General Committee of the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, and chairmanship of the ICAC Review Committee and the Hong Kong Member Committee of the Pacific Basin Economic Council.

Dr Sohmen has taken an active part in the academic and cultural development of Hong Kong. For some eight years, he has been involved with the Hong Kong Arts Centre and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. It was under his chairmanship, indeed, that the Arts Centre became an accredited tertiary institution. He is a founding member of our University Court and is a member of the Court of the University of Hong Kong. Indeed, his association with our University dates back to 1991, when he became a member of the President’s Advisory Board. Currently, he is Convenor of our Art and Culture Task Force, leading a small group to give advice on how to develop our campus into a more genteel and more cultural environment for the University community.

Dr Sohmen is also a member of the Steering Committee of the HKUST Europe Institute, to be established on campus. This will be a technology and management-based umbrella organisation, to coordinate and facilitate cooperation with European partners, and provide footholds for European entities seeking to establish a presence in Hong Kong—in particular, in areas of applied research and development, services, and technology-based manufacturing.

Dr Sohmen has hosted, almost quarterly starting from 1993, a distinguished group of business leaders, government officials and diplomats, as well as faculty members of HKUST, over the HKUST Business Roundtable Dinner.

Dr Sohmen established the Egon-Sohmen-Foundation, in memory of his brother, for the examination of economic policy issues; and the Sohmen Foundation, which sponsors literary, academic and cultural endeavours around the world. Through the Sohmen Foundation, he established the Sohmen Foundation Austria Summer Program Award at HKUST in June 1997 to support students taking part in a summer programme organised by the University of Vienna.

FIFTH CONGREGATION

Dr Sohmen has taken an active part in the academic and cultural development of Hong Kong. For some eight years, he has been involved with the Hong Kong Arts Centre and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. It was under his chairmanship, indeed, that the APA became an accredited tertiary institution. He is a founding member of our University Court and is a member of the Court of the University of Hong Kong. Indeed, his association with our University dates back to 1991, when he became a member of the President’s Advisory Board. Currently, he is Convenor of our Art and Culture Task Force, leading a small group to give advice on how to develop our campus into a more genteel and more cultural environment for the University community.

Dr Sohmen is also a member of the Steering Committee of the HKUST Europe Institute, to be established on campus. This will be a technology and management-based umbrella organisation, to coordinate and facilitate cooperation with European partners, and provide footholds for European entities seeking to establish a presence in Hong Kong—in particular, in areas of applied research and development, services, and technology-based manufacturing.

Dr Sohmen has hosted, almost quarterly starting from 1993, a distinguished group of business leaders, government officials and diplomats, as well as faculty members of HKUST, over the HKUST Business Roundtable Dinner.

Dr Sohmen established the Egon-Sohmen-Foundation, in memory of his brother, for the examination of economic policy issues; and the Sohmen Foundation, which sponsors literary, academic and cultural endeavours around the world. Through the Sohmen Foundation, he established the Sohmen Foundation Austria Summer Program Award at HKUST in June 1997 to support students taking part in a summer programme organised by the University of Vienna.

Dr Sohmen has taken an active part in the academic and cultural development of Hong Kong. For some eight years, he has been involved with the Hong Kong Arts Centre and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. It was under his chairmanship, indeed, that the APA became an accredited tertiary institution. He is a founding member of our University Court and is a member of the Court of the University of Hong Kong. Indeed, his association with our University dates back to 1991, when he became a member of the President’s Advisory Board. Currently, he is Convenor of our Art and Culture Task Force, leading a small group to give advice on how to develop our campus into a more genteel and more cultural environment for the University community.

Dr Sohmen is also a member of the Steering Committee of the HKUST Europe Institute, to be established on campus. This will be a technology and management-based umbrella organisation, to coordinate and facilitate cooperation with European partners, and provide footholds for European entities seeking to establish a presence in Hong Kong—in particular, in areas of applied research and development, services, and technology-based manufacturing.

Dr Sohmen has hosted, almost quarterly starting from 1993, a distinguished group of business leaders, government officials and diplomats, as well as faculty members of HKUST, over the HKUST Business Roundtable Dinner.

Dr Sohmen established the Egon-Sohmen-Foundation, in memory of his brother, for the examination of economic policy issues; and the Sohmen Foundation, which sponsors literary, academic and cultural endeavours around the world. Through the Sohmen Foundation, he established the Sohmen Foundation Austria Summer Program Award at HKUST in June 1997 to support students taking part in a summer programme organised by the University of Vienna.

Dr Sohmen has taken an active part in the academic and cultural development of Hong Kong. For some eight years, he has been involved with the Hong Kong Arts Centre and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. It was under his chairmanship, indeed, that the APA became an accredited tertiary institution. He is a founding member of our University Court and is a member of the Court of the University of Hong Kong. Indeed, his association with our University dates back to 1991, when he became a member of the President’s Advisory Board. Currently, he is Convenor of our Art and Culture Task Force, leading a small group to give advice on how to develop our campus into a more genteel and more cultural environment for the University community.

Dr Sohmen is also a member of the Steering Committee of the HKUST Europe Institute, to be established on campus. This will be a technology and management-based umbrella organisation, to coordinate and facilitate cooperation with European partners, and provide footholds for European entities seeking to establish a presence in Hong Kong—in particular, in areas of applied research and development, services, and technology-based manufacturing.

Dr Sohmen has hosted, almost quarterly starting from 1993, a distinguished group of business leaders, government officials and diplomats, as well as faculty members of HKUST, over the HKUST Business Roundtable Dinner.

Dr Sohmen established the Egon-Sohmen-Foundation, in memory of his brother, for the examination of economic policy issues; and the Sohmen Foundation, which sponsors literary, academic and cultural endeavours around the world. Through the Sohmen Foundation, he established the Sohmen Foundation Austria Summer Program Award at HKUST in June 1997 to support students taking part in a summer programme organised by the University of Vienna.
Dr Sohmen has not lost contact with his roots. In 1991, he became founding Chairman of the Hong Kong Austrian Association in Hong Kong and a member of the Austrian Chancellor's International Advisory Group, as well as Honorary Chairman of the Austro-Chinese Friendship Society in Vienna. In 1995, he was nominated by the Austrian Foreign Minister to the ASEAN-EU Eminent Persons Group. He also established the Sohmen-Far East-Foundation for promoting awareness of East Asia among young Austrian managers, and the Sohmen-China-Foundation to support bilateral ties between Austria and China.

Mr Chancellor,

I have the honour to present, on behalf of the University, Dr Helmut Sohmen, Knight Grand Commander of the Humane Order of African Redemption (Liberia), Commander of the National Order Nuñez de Balboa (Panama), Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (United Kingdom), Grand Badge of Honour in Silver (Austria), citizen of the world, for the degree of Doctor of Letters honoris causa.