

# Chairman's Statement

I am pleased to report that 2005 was a year of strong financial performance for the Group. In the twelve months ended 31 December 2005, the Group generated a total profit attributable to shareholders of HK\$13,494 million, up 12.8% from 2004. Earnings per share were HK\$1.28, up 12.8%. The Group's operating income rose by 12.9% to HK\$17,896 million whereas operating profit increased by 17.5% to HK\$12,166 million.

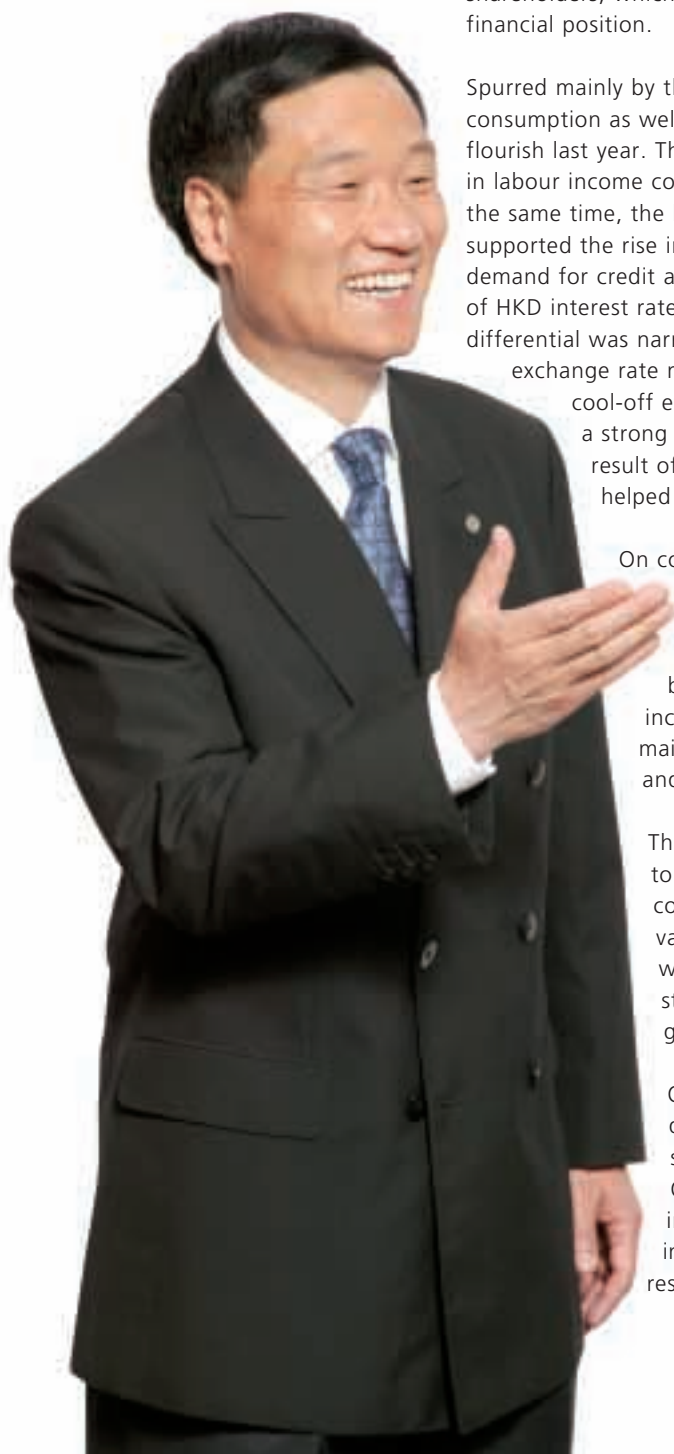
The Board is recommending a final dividend of HK\$0.480 per share at the Annual General Meeting on 26 May 2006. After taking into account the interim dividend of HK\$0.328 per share, the total dividend for the full year 2005 will be HK\$0.808 per share. (Total dividend for 2004: HK\$0.715 per share). This means that the Group's dividend payout ratio for 2005 will be 63.31% of profit attributable to shareholders, which is made possible by our good business results and healthy financial position.

Spurred mainly by the growth of exports of merchandise and services, private consumption as well as tourist spending, the Hong Kong economy continued to flourish last year. The improvement of the local employment situation and the rise in labour income contributed significantly to the rise in domestic consumption. At the same time, the business sector's general anticipation of sustainable growth supported the rise in investment. All in all, there was considerable growth in the demand for credit and banking services. During the year, the upward movement of HKD interest rates was basically in line with USD interest rates, and the differential was narrowed following the refinement of the operation of the linked exchange rate mechanism since May 2005. While higher interest rates had a cool-off effect on the local residential property market, large banks with a strong deposit base were able to grow their interest income as a result of higher credit demand. The benign credit environment also helped banks to maintain good asset quality.

On corporate development, I take pride to report that under the Board's guidance, the Group's enhanced and effectual management structure that came in place last year has been exerting the power and leadership we need to drive our business development strategy, leading to higher growth in income and profit. We have also lived up to our pledge to maintain high standards of corporate governance, internal control and risk management.

The corporate culture as approved by the Board last year has begun to take root throughout the Group, giving rise to the stronger commitment and motivation of our workforce to deliver the best value to our shareholders and customers. We firmly believe that with the strong backup of our employees, we can move forward in strides with a strategy that is geared towards pursuing business growth and service excellence.

Our achievements in the past year speak for our success in delivering the promise of creating values and superior returns to shareholders. In short, we continued to excel in our strong areas. Our retail banking businesses registered outstanding growth in income and profit, driven primarily by the rise in net interest income and fee income. We also maintained our leadership in residential mortgage lending. On the corporate front, we remained



the leader in arranging syndicated loans and expanded our market share in trade-related services and SME lending respectively. Despite the rise in interest rates, our treasury was able to continue with investment portfolio diversification as well as product innovation and customisation, giving rise to higher yield and a broader customer base. Our branches in the Mainland continued to perform well, contributing to both the Group's top-line and bottom-line growth.

Looking ahead, we believe that although the local economy in general would probably be impacted to various degrees by rising interest rates, oil price fluctuation and inflation, its growth momentum is likely to remain steady. Investment, employment and domestic spending are expected to sustain their respective growth trend. The outlook of the Chinese economy, on the other hand, still remains sanguine notwithstanding mounting pressure to raise interest rates and re-value its currency. We are therefore optimistic that the demand for credit and banking services in these two major markets will keep rising in the coming year, which is favorable to the Group's growth and expansion.

To ensure that the Group's investment value is fully and properly reflected in its business strategy and to safeguard the best interests of all the shareholders, the Board established the Strategy Development Group last year with Mdm. Linda Tsao Yang, Independent Non-Executive Director, as the convener and has mapped out the Group's strategic plan for 2006-2011 with the participation of the Management and representatives from BOC. The strategic plan gives a clear direction for the Group in moving forward in the next five years. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mdm. Yang and all the members of the Strategy Development Group for their devotion in the past several months and the excellent job they have done.

The strategic plan for 2006-2011 will steer the Group towards realising the vision of becoming a top-quality financial services group with a powerful base in Hong Kong, a solid presence in China and a strategic foothold in the region. Under this strategic plan, the Group's strategic focus in the next five years will be on the strengthening of our leading position in Hong Kong, the development of new capabilities in product manufacturing and distribution, the building of a stronger presence in China, and the exploration of regional expansion opportunities.

The strengthening of our existing leading position in Hong Kong will drive our organic growth in both traditional and newly developed businesses. The building of new capabilities will establish for us a strong manufacturing-cum-distribution business model, with a view to developing BOCHK into a product manufacturer for the BOC group. Given China's enormous growth potential, we will be taking a more proactive approach in expanding our presence in key business hubs in the Pearl River Delta, Yangzi River Delta and major coastal cities. To fortify our position in Hong Kong and China, we believe it is important to have a foothold in the region as well and will therefore be on the lookout for appropriate acquisition or joint-venture opportunities so that we can support customers' banking needs in the region.

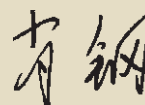
As the first step, we will discuss with BOC with a view to acquiring a majority stake in BOC Group Life Assurance Company Limited. Further announcement will be made as soon as the definitive terms have been finalised.

I am confident that, given our core competencies and competitive advantages, the successful implementation of our strategic plan will enable us to achieve sustainable and healthy growth in income and profit with a broader range of top-

quality banking and financial services. It will also deepen our presence in the fast-growing Mainland market and give us the foothold we need in the region. Above all, it will ensure that we can continue to deliver higher value to shareholders and customers in and outside Hong Kong as well as enhance our franchise value to the BOC group as a whole.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our gratitude to Mr. Anthony Francis Neoh, who resigned as Senior Adviser to the Board with effect from 1 January 2006. Mr. Neoh has made immense contribution to the Group during his tenure of office and we are fortunate that BOC will continue to benefit from his expertise in his current capacity as an Independent Non-executive Director. I would also like to welcome Mr. Tung Wai-hok Savio and Mr. Koh Beng Seng, who joined as Independent Non-executive Directors of the Board with effect from 1 December 2005 and 23 March 2006 respectively. We are certain that with their rich credentials in finance, Mr. Tung and Mr. Koh will bring valuable new thinking to the Group.

In closing, I wish to thank the Board of Directors and the former Senior Adviser again for their wise counsel. I also wish to thank our shareholders and customers for their trust and support. Last but not the least, I must thank our employees. It is their passion and commitment together with the professionalism they bring to their jobs that keep us on course to be the customer's premier bank.



**XIAO Gang**  
Chairman

Hong Kong, 23 March 2006