

RESPONSE BY CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON
OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2018

Monday, 8 January 2018

Mr Attorney,

Mr Vijayendran,

Members of the Bar,

Honoured Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I. Introduction

1. It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Judiciary, to welcome you all to the Opening of this Legal Year. I particularly wish to thank the Honourable Chief Justice Prof Dr M Hatta Ali and Justice Takdir Rahmadi of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, the Right Honourable Tun Md Raus Sharif, Chief Justice of Malaysia, and our other guests from abroad, who have made the effort to travel here to be with us this morning.

II. Felicitations

2. 2017 was a year when we consolidated the ongoing development of the Supreme Court Bench, and I shall begin my response with a brief recap of the major changes, most of which have been alluded to.

A. Court of Appeal

3. Justice Steven Chong was appointed as a Judge of Appeal on 1 April 2017. This was in anticipation of Justice Chao Hick Tin's retirement on 27 September 2017, after five illustrious decades in the public service. In the same context, Justice Andrew Phang was appointed Vice-President of the Court of Appeal. While we will feel the void left by Justice Chao's retirement, I am heartened that we have in place a strong team of judges to lead us forward; and delighted that Justice Chao will continue contributing to the work of the Supreme Court, following his appointment, a few days ago, as a Senior Judge.
4. At the same time, we bid farewell to Senior Judge Chan Sek Keong. We are immensely grateful that even after his retirement as Chief Justice, Senior Judge Chan continued to sit as an occasional member of the Court of Appeal over the last three years. He will certainly be missed.

B. High Court

5. In the High Court, we welcomed Justice Tan Siong Thye's return to the Bench on 1 April 2017, after serving as the nation's first Deputy Attorney-General.
6. We also saw a number of re-appointments last year, which retained the experience of some of our senior members of the Bench. Justice Quentin Loh was re-appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court for a term of three years with effect from 25 December 2017, and he will continue serving as the Judge in charge of the Singapore International Commercial Court ("**SICC**"). Senior Judges

Andrew Ang, Tan Lee Meng and Lai Siu Chiu were re-appointed for further terms of three years each, with effect from 5 January this year.

7. I have also appointed Justice Belinda Ang to serve as the Judge in charge of the High Court. In this capacity, she will assist me in overseeing the management of the High Court. Going forward, she and Justice Quentin Loh will sit in the Court of Appeal with greater frequency to help manage the growing workload of our apex court.
8. I congratulate Justices See Kee Oon, Chua Lee Ming, Kannan Ramesh, Valerie Thean, Hoo Sheau Peng, Debbie Ong and Aedit Abdullah on their appointments as Judges of the Supreme Court. Justice See's term as the Presiding Judge of the State Courts has been extended for two years, while Justice Ong has taken over the reins from Justice Thean as the Presiding Judge of the Family Justice Courts ("**FJC**"), for a term of three years.
9. Finally, I thank Senior Judge Kan Ting Chiu, whose term as Senior Judge concluded on 4 January this year. I am deeply grateful for his wonderful contributions to the Judiciary over the course of more than a quarter of a century.

C. SICC

10. In relation to the SICC, I am pleased to announce that of the 12 International Judges who were first appointed in 2015, 11 have been reappointed by Her Excellency the President, for new terms that will expire in three years. Judge Irmgard Griss did not seek re-appointment following her election into the Austrian

Parliament. We thank her for her contributions and wish her the very best in her future endeavours.

11. I am also delighted that Her Excellency the President has appointed four new International Judges who are immensely respected jurists, and whose appointments will surely enhance the standing of the SICC. They are:

(a) From Australia, the Honourable Robert French, retired immediate past Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia.

(b) From Canada, the Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin, retired immediate past Chief Justice of Canada.

(c) From the United Kingdom:

(i) the Right Honourable Lord Neuberger of Abbotsbury, retired immediate past President of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom; and

(ii) the Honourable Sir Jeremy Cooke, former Judge in charge of the Commercial Court of England and Wales. I should mention here that the very idea of the SICC was conceived in a conversation that I had in London with Sir Jeremy when he was Judge in charge of the Commercial Court, and I am pleased that he is, today, a member of our court.

12. These changes to the Bench, both local and international, have brought together a pool of judicial expertise that blends a formidable diversity of talents and backgrounds with a deeply shared commitment to excellence in the administration of justice.

13. Finally, I take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to Mr Hri Kumar Nair SC, on his appointment as Deputy Attorney-General.

III. Key developments in the Courts

14. It is customary in the Chief Justice's Response at the Opening of the Legal Year to review the key developments in our courts over the preceding year, and it is to this I now turn.

A. The Supreme Court

1. *Domestic front*

15. The Civil Justice Commission was established under the leadership of Justice Tay Yong Kwang three years ago. The Commission, which includes members of the Judiciary, the Legal Service, the Bar, academia and a representative from the Ministry of Law, has comprehensively reviewed our existing civil procedure, and recently submitted to me a detailed report with a proposed set of modernised rules. Simply put, this is a monumental piece of work. The Commission's recommendations will be discussed further with the Ministry of Law and, in due course, will be published for consultation. Subject to any modifications that might arise from these consultations, we hope that the implementation of some of the principal recommendations may commence this year. When this project is completed, I expect that our civil procedure will have changed very significantly and will be better suited to our present circumstances and needs. Justice Tay

and the members of the Commission have worked extremely hard to complete this work and I am deeply grateful to them.

16. The Government has also proposed major changes to our criminal justice system, with substantial amendments to both the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code in the pipeline this year. The Judiciary has been consulted on the proposals and we now await their deliberation by Parliament.
17. In relation to the operations of the Supreme Court, arising from the strong demand for courtroom news to be transmitted to the public in a timely fashion, we allowed the media, on a pilot basis, to undertake real-time text reporting of proceedings in a Criminal Reference before the Court of Appeal last year. This was well received, and we found that the responsible use of electronic communicative devices in the courtroom did not disrupt the proceedings. We have therefore decided to permit this for all Court of Appeal hearings starting from February 2018. This will apply to the media and to members of the public. However, the prohibition against audio recording, photography and videography will remain in place at this time.

2. *International front*

18. Looking beyond our domestic space, the SICC celebrates its third anniversary this month. In the past year, nine cases were transferred to the SICC from the High Court, bringing the total number of cases in the SICC's docket to 17. These figures can be expected to continue growing; indeed, if the pending amendments to the Supreme Court of Judicature Act are passed by Parliament, we can also

expect the SICC to hear cases under the International Arbitration Act. Finally, in the preceding year, several appeals have been brought against first instance decisions of the SICC, thus allowing us to observe the SICC's appellate mechanism at work.

19. The Supreme Court also continues to develop and strengthen its judicial networks regionally and globally.
20. Some obvious manifestations of these efforts are the many memoranda on judicial cooperation, enforcement of money judgments and references on questions of law, which we have variously entered into this past year with the Supreme People's Court of Vietnam, the Abu Dhabi Global Market Courts, the Supreme Court of Victoria, the Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China, the Supreme Court of Bermuda, the Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre, and the Supreme Judiciary Council of Qatar. Notably, the memorandum on cooperation with the Chinese judiciary established an annual Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable, the inaugural edition of which was held in Beijing last August. This is a historic first between China and an Asian country. The Roundtable was co-hosted by His Excellency the President of the Supreme People's Court and me. The second Roundtable will be held in Singapore this year, and I look forward to deepening our collaboration with our Chinese counterparts.
21. The Supreme Court also participated in the inaugural Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts in London on 5 May 2017, together with 28 courts from around the world. The Forum aims to enhance the judicial resolution of international commercial disputes through the sharing of experiences and best

practices. The next edition of the Forum will be hosted in New York later this year and we expect to be a significant contributor once again.

22. Justice Andrew Phang, Justice Judith Prakash and I also participated for the first time in the Asia-Pacific Judicial Colloquium, which brought together a small group of judges from the apex courts of Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand and now Singapore, for a frank, open and rich discussion on selected topics of substantive law and court management. We greatly benefitted from the Colloquium and will host the next meeting in 2019.
23. I am optimistic that with our continuing efforts on the international front, we will forge strong cross-jurisdictional relationships with other like-minded courts from around the world. This is essential in an age of internationalisation which both of you, Mr Attorney and Mr Vijayendran, have spoken about, and which is an issue to which I shall return later in my address.

B. The State Courts

24. Turning to the State Courts, we saw two key developments in the community justice space:
 - (a) First, the Employment Claims Tribunals (“**ECT**”) commenced operations in April 2017. The ECT adjudicates employment disputes in a tribunal setting, adopting a low-cost framework with simplified processes. This provides an affordable and expeditious way for resolving such disputes.
 - (b) Second, the initial phase of the Community Justice and Tribunals System was launched on 10 July 2017. All claims at the Small Claims Tribunals can

now be conveniently filed and managed online. Parties can also attempt to settle their disputes in a secure online environment without attending court.

Work to enhance this e-Negotiation platform is continuing.

25. In relation to criminal justice, the State Courts and the Singapore Academy of Law (“**Academy**”) jointly organised the Sentencing Conference in October 2017. This generated lively discussions among the various criminal justice stakeholders. Arising from some of those discussions, the Sentencing Information and Research Repository will be enhanced, beginning with the inclusion of case summaries for selected categories of cases. The Repository will also be made available to LawNet Basic subscribers this year.

C. The FJC

26. Let me turn to family justice. This has recently generated some public discussion and interest. It is an area of paramount interest to our citizenry, where important familial, community and social interests are at stake. It was the need to resolve family disputes as appropriately as possible that precipitated the establishment of the FJC as a separate set of courts in October 2014. Since then, we have made significant strides towards embracing a more amicable and multi-disciplinary approach to the resolution of family disputes.

27. Various initiatives have been implemented to reduce the acrimony of these disputes. These include the Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution process, the Parenting Coordination scheme, and the Private Mediation scheme. A simplified track has also been introduced for uncontested divorces, to reduce the pain and

acrimony that divorcing parties often endure. For matters that do proceed to trial, a judge-led approach has been adopted to mitigate some of the excesses of adversarial litigation in this context. These initiatives, it has to be said, have achieved considerable success. For instance, the percentage of divorce cases decided under the simplified track with no contested issues has increased from 24% of all cases filed in 2015, to 37% in 2016, and 49% in 2017. The percentage of divorces that proceed to contested ancillary matters hearings has also decreased over the years. Notably, in 2016, less than 7% of divorce hearings were contested on either the grounds of divorce or on ancillary matters. This low proportion of contested hearings is a result of, amongst other things, the greater use of mediation and counselling and the slew of other measures that have been introduced over the years, in the effort to encourage the parties to resolve their differences with less acrimony. In addition, there has been a significant reduction in the time taken to obtain judgments – the average time for the grant of Interim Judgment has decreased from just over 68 days in 2012 to about 53 days in 2016, while the average time for the grant of Final Judgment has decreased from about 155 days in 2012 to about 114 days in 2016.

28. It is unsurprising that in this landscape of changing practices and priorities, the FJC has emphasised the need for specialised training of family law practitioners and judges. I want to say something about why this is so important. A recent news report told of a case in which an Australian Judge referred lawyers involved in a family dispute to the Legal Services Commission of New South Wales. The Judge noted the inflammatory and verbose nature of the lawyers' letters, which seemed to reflect the anger and vitriol of their clients. Their conduct led to a huge escalation of the costs involved. The impact of diverting resources to pay legal

costs is especially aggravated in matrimonial proceedings because there is already less to go round when one household becomes two. But there is another, even more compelling concern. Social science research reveals that the more acrimonious the process, the greater the harm inflicted on the parties and especially on the children. We *must* therefore press on with concerted reform efforts to protect those caught up in family disputes from such harm.

29. In this regard, a number of family law practitioners have come forward to be trained as family mediators, Child Representatives and Parenting Coordinators. I welcome this and urge the Family Bar to continue investing in multi-disciplinary training. The FJC has been working closely with the Family Bar to devise a Best Practice Guide for Family Practice. The Guide will institutionalise practices for reducing acrimony, focusing on the best interests of the child, and reaching workable solutions for the family. Further upstream, the FJC has been supporting the Singapore University of Social Sciences in identifying students suited to family law practice, as well as providing input for the school's curriculum.
30. I would like to express my gratitude to Justice Thean, who oversaw the implementation of many of these initiatives during her term as the first Presiding Judge of the FJC. There is much that remains to be done and Justice Ong will lead the next phase of developments in the FJC, as part of our continuing reform efforts.
31. To this end, an inter-agency committee has been formed with representatives from the Ministry of Law, the Ministry of Social and Family Development, and the FJC, to review the existing reforms and identify areas for further improvement. The committee will be co-chaired by Justice Ong and the Permanent Secretaries

of the two Ministries. It will consider further measures to strengthen access to family justice, to promote alternative and multi-disciplinary approaches to conflict resolution and to incorporate principles of therapeutic and restorative justice into this framework. The committee will also examine how we can enhance the training of family lawyers and judges, and consider the issue of specialist accreditation in this context.

32. On a related note, I have asked the FJC to work with the Law Society to explore the possibility of launching a Family Law Assistance Scheme. Broadly, the idea is to develop a *low bono* model inspired by the tremendous success of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme. If this comes to fruition, it will increase access to legal services for those within the “sandwich class” who get embroiled in family disputes. The underlying thinking is that if properly trained and committed practitioners bring their wisdom and counsel to bear on these disputes, this too should help reduce acrimony in the proceedings. Mr Vijayendran, we discussed this some months ago and I am deeply grateful for the enthusiastic reception and the pledge of support you have extended. I look forward to the support of the Bar.

IV. The Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

33. These reforms and initiatives aim to equip our legal system to better meet the challenges and demands of the day. But more will need to be done if we are to remain ahead of the curve in a world that is changing at a dramatic pace.
34. As you have recognised, Mr Attorney, there is a pressing need to future-proof our institutions and ourselves. We must take a keen interest in ensuring that our

legal sector remains relevant and competitive, not just domestically, but also regionally and internationally.

35. I will highlight three areas where we can expect critical challenges that we must face up to with some urgency. I have spoken about each of these matters on previous occasions and I do so again, on this important occasion, to underscore their urgency.

A. Internationalisation of legal practice

36. The first area relates to the growing internationalisation of legal practice.
37. I have previously emphasised that the practice of law will, and indeed has, become increasingly international in nature. This trajectory *will* continue for the foreseeable future. We have already seen an unprecedented increase in the number of transnational legal disputes. Arbitration has been the frontrunner for resolving many of these disputes; but even litigation, traditionally a jurisdiction-bound practice, has been swept up in this wave. International commercial litigation has burgeoned in recent years, as evidenced by the rising incidence of cases involving parties and laws of different jurisdictions, and the emergence of new international commercial courts globally.
38. From an institutional perspective, we have done well to maintain our relevance as a credible centre for international dispute resolution. The SICCC, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre and the Singapore International Mediation Centre together offer a suite of world-class options for resolving transnational legal

disputes. Our increased international judicial engagements will also enable us to make a meaningful contribution to the global conversations that are taking place.

39. But a confluence of factors puts us in an especially good position to make a meaningful contribution to the regional legal sector in the coming year. We will host the 13th ASEAN Law Association (“**ALA**”) General Assembly this July, at which time I will assume the Presidency of ALA for a term of three years. The ASEAN Law Conference will be hosted here, in tandem with the ALA General Assembly. There will be a number of important meetings on the side of the General Assembly, including meetings of the ASEAN Chief Justices, Attorneys-General, Law Society and Bar Association Presidents, and so on. I will also chair the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices for a one-year term commencing in July this year. All this will place us in a ringside seat to developments affecting the legal communities of one of the fastest growing regions in the world, and we must participate actively in the many opportunities this will present us, to work for the betterment of all.

40. On a related note, I am pleased to mention the inaugural publication of the Asian Business Law Institute (“**ABLI**”), titled “Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Asia”. This will be made freely available on the ABLI website immediately after these proceedings. It comprises 15 country reports written by legal scholars and practitioners, and will be useful to lawyers and general counsel in the region. It will also serve as a springboard for the next phase of the project – which is, to consider whether sufficient areas of commonality exist for further meaningful convergence to be developed.

41. We will continue to do our part to ensure that we are well-placed to meet the challenges of the internationalisation of legal practice. But the success of these efforts ultimately depends on each practitioner's commitment to equip himself or herself for the changing complexion of legal practice. I urge our legal community to recognise the opportunities that will come with these challenges and to rise up to meet them with confidence.

B. The technology disruption

42. The second area I wish to touch on relates to the disruptive force of technology.

43. At the opening of the last Legal Year, I touched on the greater involvement of IT professionals in the legal process, and how automation and artificial intelligence are revolutionising the practice of law. It is with some urgency that we must begin to imagine what this will mean for the practice of law.

44. The Courts of the Future Taskforce was established in 2016. Last year, I endorsed the Taskforce's recommendation to set up a unified One Judiciary IT Steering Committee and the Technology Blueprint for the courts. Since then, a total of 15 key IT initiatives have been conceptualised with three overarching objectives in mind, namely: developing self-help solutions for litigants, developing solutions for an efficient and effective justice system, and adopting the intelligent use of data.

45. Four of those initiatives have been identified as starter projects, and principally relate to developing new capabilities for online dispute resolution and virtual hearings. We have commenced engaging external agencies and seeking the

necessary funding to implement these projects. To begin, we will study the benefits of adopting online dispute resolution in road traffic accident personal injury disputes in the State Courts, and maintenance disputes in the FJC.

46. The Academy has also been working to help legal professionals to cope with the anticipated disruption of technology. This is part of an on-going effort involving the Academy, the Ministry of Law and the Law Society to promote the adoption of Legal Tech and the incubation of a Legal Tech scene in Singapore. I will touch on three key developments in this regard:

(a) First, the Future Law Innovation Programme (“**FLIP**”) is a strategic initiative driven by the Academy to assist law firms in innovating new ways of delivering legal services and integrating technology within their processes. It also seeks to facilitate the cross-pollination of ideas between the technology and legal sectors, and to create a vibrant Legal Tech ecosystem for the future economy. The response to FLIP has been overwhelming – the Academy has received almost 50 applications from various entities since last September, of which 21 have been selected to kick-start innovative technology projects. As a sign of the times, I find it noteworthy that just this morning, the media reported the development of an outcome simulator for use in predicting the division of assets in matrimonial proceedings. This was done by a team of former schoolmates who started a company known as Lex Quanta which, I am happy to say, will be a part of FLIP.

(b) Second, LawNet will be upgraded to enhance the research experience through the introduction of intelligent search functions. The Academy and

the Law Society are also collaborating to create a new module carrying case digests and commentaries on criminal sentencing. In the near future, LawNet will be further transformed to provide a myriad of Legal Tech services. For instance, we will soon see the launch of the LawNet Community, Singapore's first online nexus for all things law-related. This will go beyond providing legal updates, and include tools for learning and development, mentorship, professional profiling, collaboration, business development and trial of legal support services.

- (c) Third, the inaugural *TechLaw.Fest 2018* event will be held over three days from 4 to 6 April this year, It will be the first to bring together the technology law and Legal Tech communities in one multi-track programme, and is set to be the highlight of the technology and law scene in Asia.

- 47. Technology *will* change the spaces traditionally occupied by lawyers, and these initiatives have been devised to help you meet the challenges that lie ahead. But again, these efforts will not, on their own, be sufficient. Each individual stakeholder must act to integrate the understanding and use of technology within his or her area of work; to embrace it, rather than to be put off by it.

C. Raising professional standards

- 48. This leads me to the third and final area, which relates to raising professional standards. It has become fashionable in some circles to speak of the “business” of law; but even as we adopt management techniques and practices from the

world of commerce, we *must* continue to identify ourselves as members of a noble profession. I make five brief points in this context.

1. *Legal education*

49. First, we need to think about what we must do to ensure that our law graduates are equipped for the changing demands of modern legal practice. I first raised this when I addressed the gathering at the 60th Anniversary Celebrations of the NUS Law Faculty and we have since started a number of further conversations. We must act to chart a course that will lead to the development of resilient and competent professionals, suitable not only for today's operating environment, but for the years ahead as well.

2. *Professional training and continuing legal education*

50. Second, we need to improve our professional training and continuing legal education framework.
51. The Committee for the Professional Training of Lawyers was established in 2016, under the leadership of Justice Quentin Loh, to examine a number of interconnected challenges, including the shortage of training contracts and the critical need to enhance the mentorship of young lawyers. The Committee has consulted a wide range of stakeholders to gain deeper insight into their interests and concerns; it has also conducted comparative studies of the professional training structures in other jurisdictions. The Committee's report will be submitted by the first quarter of this year, and I very much look forward to it.

52. Similarly, the Academy has engaged the legal community over the past year to identify the ways in which continuing legal education may be improved. Today, I am pleased to announce the completion of the pilot framework for the Legal Industry Framework for Training and Education, suitably abbreviated as “LIFTED”. LIFTED seeks to help legal professionals to plan their professional development, and it is integrated with the national SkillsFuture initiative.
53. One of the key LIFTED initiatives is the development of a mobile, web-based application. The app will enable individual learners to browse all Continuing Professional Development activities accredited by the Singapore Institute of Legal Education, as well as curated non-accredited activities across a range of platforms and providers. Individuals can also undertake an analysis of their own learning needs, and plan their continuing education with longer term career goals in mind. Employers and providers of continuing legal education, too, can use the app when deciding on suitable learning and development programmes.
54. Other resources stemming from LIFTED include the Learning Planner which you will have received today, a Twitter feed featuring curated articles relevant to the legal profession, as well as online resources hosted on the Academy’s website. I urge you to take advantage of the available resources.

3. *Specialist accreditation*

55. The third way we can raise professional standards is by recognising professional excellence through specialist accreditation.

56. The pilot accreditation scheme for building and construction lawyers, which I spoke of last year, has now been implemented. Again, I am grateful to Justice Loh, who led this initiative. I am delighted to announce that after a rigorous assessment process, a total of 13 applicants under the “Senior” category and 11 applicants under the “Junior” category have successfully been accredited, respectively as senior specialists and specialists. Given the success of this pilot, we will extend the scheme to maritime and shipping lawyers this year, with details to be published once the framework has been finalised.

4. *Judicial education*

57. Fourth, like other members of our profession, Judges and judicial officers must have ample opportunity for continuing education and development.

58. It is precisely for this reason that the Singapore Judicial College was established in 2015. Over the last three years, the College has made excellent progress. Local Judges and judicial officers now have about 40 training programmes to select from annually; and around 1,000 foreign judges and officials from 70 jurisdictions around the world have attended the College’s training programmes. The College’s empirical judicial research programme has also commissioned nine research projects, of which five have been completed, including three that have been published. Another three research projects are expected this year. Going forward, the College will continue developing its pedagogy and augmenting its programmes. We are also looking into developing a specialist advanced degree or diploma programme for judges, and hope to finalise our position on this in the course of the coming year.

5. ***Ethos of the legal profession***

59. The fifth and final point I make in this context is that beyond sharpening our craft, we must be acutely conscious of our responsibility as members of an honourable profession. The spirit of service for the betterment of society is what distinguishes the law as a profession.
60. Forging such a spirit starts from law school, if not even earlier, and continues throughout the career of a legal professional. In this regard, there are three key points we should keep in mind:
- (a) First, senior lawyers must be committed to inculcating a keen sense of public service in our next generation of lawyers, inspiring them to embrace the practice of law as a noble profession, rather than seeing it as a platform solely for the fulfilment of personal goals and ambitions. In this connection, I warmly welcome the steps that the Law Society is taking to promote the involvement of senior lawyers in mentoring our younger colleagues.
 - (b) Second, as you, Mr Vijayendran, have recognised, lawyers must be committed to improving the public's access to professional legal services. This includes partaking in *pro bono* or *low bono* work. A healthy dose of such work can help lawyers cultivate an ingrained attitude of service and selflessness towards clients in need. Senior lawyers must give due recognition for such efforts, and dispel the notion that a junior's engagement in such work entails a trade-off in career progression.
 - (c) Third, as an officer of the court, each lawyer must strive to uphold the highest standards not just in relation to competence, but equally in ethics.

This includes eschewing any form of unethical or unprofessional conduct, even if such conduct might seem to advance a client's interests.

61. I cannot emphasise enough the importance for lawyers to appreciate what it means to be a part of a profession, which – when stripped of all attendant niceties and privileges – embodies at its core, a spirit of public service. I hope that we will each stay true to the calling to serve the common good.

V. Appointment of Senior Counsel

62. These remarks on the ethos of the profession lead me appropriately to the point where I announce the appointment of Senior Counsel. The Selection Committee has decided this year to appoint Ms Kuah Boon Theng as Senior Counsel. I congratulate Ms Kuah and encourage her to continue to play an important role as a mentor and model for our younger colleagues.

VI. Conclusion

63. As I close my response this morning, I reiterate my earlier observation that our profession is facing unprecedented change. It is vital that we recognise this reality and resolve to meet it with conviction. The challenges ahead are many, and I have outlined just three of the more critical ones this morning. To meet these challenges, we must embrace new ways of doing things. Here, a particular responsibility lies on the senior members of the profession; you are in the position to effect change, so that our younger colleagues will have a worthwhile future to look forward to. We, who have been blessed with so much, are duty-bound to do

what we must for the sake of our collective future. As a profession, we have overcome many challenges in the past; and I do believe we will come together to surmount the challenges of *these* times.

64. Thank you all very much for your presence this morning. On behalf of the Judiciary, I wish all of you a happy, healthy and fulfilling new year.