

SAL ANNUAL APPRECIATION DINNER 2016

30 August 2016

Speech of the Honourable Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

Ladies and gentlemen

1 We gather here today to commemorate another year of the Academy's achievements, all of which has been made possible by the efforts that you have each put into the work of the Academy. I am truly heartened to see an increasing number of people join us at this dinner each year. It is a testament to the support that we have for our work.

2 2015 was a very eventful year as the Singapore legal market evolved and the Academy and its Committees worked hard to keep pace with trends in the legal sector. During the Opening of this Legal Year, I observed that the practice of law has seen a paradigm shift over the last two decades as a result of globalisation and the adoption of connective technologies. On that occasion, I suggested that we will have to be open to new ways of doing things. I am delighted that the Academy has launched several initiatives to help the legal profession adjust to this new reality. Let me highlight some of these.

Keeping pace with the internationalisation of legal practice

3 One of the biggest impediments to the internationalisation of legal practice in the region has been the lack of consistent legal standards across Asia. In

January this year, we held an international conference to promote dialogue among international stakeholders on this important topic. The conference, “Doing Business across Asia: Legal Convergence in an Asian Century”, brought together some 500 participants including senior judges, lawyers, CEOs, policy makers and academics from the region. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to each member of the Committee; they worked very hard indeed to realise a very successful conference.

4 The convergence project is a long term undertaking. Because of this, we also launched the Asian Business Law Institute (“ABLI”) to carry this work forward on a continuing basis. Some of the key initiatives on our radar include research into the business laws of Asia, outreach efforts including hosting a biennial international conference and workshops/seminars and establishing partnerships with other like-minded institutions. On this note, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Mr Mark Fisher, Deputy Executive Director who is on secondment from the international law firm, Jones Day. During his time with us, Mark will help steer ABLI’s strategic efforts, oversee and coordinate its activities.

Keeping pace with the digitisation of the economy

5 Another aspect of change that we face is the continuing digitisation of the economy, which will be perhaps the most significant game changer in our time. Law firms will need to embrace technology and innovation to stay competitive. We were among the pioneers to incorporate technology in the administration of justice. We developed platforms that enabled electronic filing of court documents

and allowed lawyers to do their research online through LawNet. As technology continues to develop, the Academy remains at the forefront of this field; but it is imperative that we keep pace with the ongoing changes and develop new capabilities to improve and enhance efficiency, the quality of legal services and access to justice.

Improved electronic services

6 2015 also saw the launch of LawNet3. The latest iteration of LawNet includes better content management and more user friendly features. A new subscription service, LawNet Premium, was also introduced last year. LawNet Premium offers LawNet users the option to access value-added content such as Academy Publishing titles, news archives from Singapore Press Holdings and sentencing information from the State Courts. To deliver timely and relevant content to LawNet users, the LawNet Steering Committee has worked closely with the Supreme Court to include practice-specific content on LawNet Premium.

7 Yet another important initiative is the introduction of electronic publishing for journals. In April 2016, Academy Publishing launched Journals Online, a dedicated website which houses an electronic archive of past issues of journals, a mechanism for online submission of papers, and most significantly, a module called e-First which allows Singapore Academy of Law Journal papers to be published sooner than would be the case based on the traditional print schedule.

Legal Technology Masterplan

8 Our efforts in this space are guided by the Legal Technology Masterplan, a comprehensive roadmap for technology transformation in the legal sector. In May this year, the Legal Technology Cluster organised a retreat which brought together key stakeholders from the judiciary, the legal fraternity, academia and the Government. The seeds planted at the retreat will come to fruition in the coming years when we expect to see a gradual establishment of a legal technology ecosystem. Our current LawNet engine already has the potential to harness artificial intelligence technologies to bring this about. When this happens, the litigation firm can integrate its own in-house systems with LawNet to seamlessly pull in legal research results from LawNet to compile trial bundles, and submit them to the Courts through e-Litigation. Technology start-ups will be able to access and draw data from LawNet to create new e-services to support the legal industry. We are looking to an exciting future with the planned release of LawNet4 in the future.

Developing competencies and skills

Within the legal sector

9 To meet the changing demands of legal practice, some of which I have already touched on, the Academy's Legal Education Cluster continues to support capability building in the legal profession through the range and depth of its legal education programmes. I will mention three of them in particular.

10 I begin with an update on the Specialist Accreditation Scheme which I alluded to at the Opening of this Legal Year. The aim is to accord due recognition to practitioners who have achieved excellence in selected areas of specialisation. This will not only reward the efforts of those practitioners, it will also incentivise younger lawyers to strive for such excellence. A committee led by Justice Quentin Loh has been tasked to look into implementing a pilot scheme for construction lawyers in the near future. The proposed scheme envisages a robust accreditation framework that will create a talented pool of construction lawyers to meet the demands of Singapore as a dispute resolution forum for local and international parties. Candidates will be assessed for accreditation based on their relevant experience and practice in construction law, attendance of related courses, performance in an examination (for the younger lawyers) and panel interviews. Details of the scheme are still being finalised, but I understand that the Committee's recommendations are on track for completion by end-September and I look forward to receiving the Committee's report.

11 We also launched the Singapore International Dispute Resolution Academy ("SIDRA"), a company limited by the guarantee of the Academy this year. The SIDRA will be the first regional institution dedicated to thought leadership, training and educational excellence in negotiation and dispute resolution. The vision is for SIDRA to be the go-to institution, in the region and beyond, for the development and imparting of practical and progressive dispute resolution knowledge and skills.

12 Finally, the SAL-INSEAD leadership programme deserves special mention. The programme has been specifically designed to address business challenges faced by law partners and to equip them to build sustainable law practices in this new age. We have moved past the day and age where lawyers only need to think like lawyers. I am therefore pleased to note that our training programmes are going beyond education on the law. In April this year, 20 leaders from large, medium-sized as well as small and boutique law firms attended the inaugural edition of this programme. The programme was very well received and I am given to understand that plans are afoot for another run next year.

Outside of the legal sector

13 Outside of the legal sector, the Academy, together with the Yellow Ribbon Fund, has established a bursary to provide financial assistance to ex-offenders who require skills training so that they may be in a position to secure gainful employment, which in turn will aid in their re-integration into Society. The Academy has since raised more than \$378,000, out of which around \$186,000 has been disbursed to support 15 ex-offenders who have opted to pursue vocational training as well as further studies. The CSR Committee, headed by Mr Thio Shen Yi, SC, aims to do more to keep this going. Last year, an inaugural futsal competition — the CJ's Cup — was organised and successfully raised more than \$62,000. To support 6 to 10 bursary recipients per year over the next 3 years, the Bursary will need your strong and continuing support to the tune of between \$150,000 and \$200,000 every year.

14 Last but certainly not least, the annual Junior College Law Programme (“JCLP”) will have its seventh run this year for those who are contemplating a career in the law. I would like to thank our mentors from the law firms and other legal organisations (many of whom are here tonight) for their patient support for this important venture. I urge you to take the time to inspire them and to impress upon them that law is a profession — a calling to serve the cause of justice.

Upcoming changes

15 Before concluding, I thought I should also give you a “heads up” on some exciting changes that lie ahead. The Academy’s work has expanded over the years and it will continue to grow. The Academy is exploring ways to better serve the needs of different sectors of the legal community. Some of the plans in the pipeline include stronger engagement with its key stakeholders; bundling of its services; refreshing its branding; and better accommodating its programmes and services with expanded facilities, which could be achieved by converting a part of the space it now occupies in the Supreme Court into training rooms and meeting facilities for our committee related work.

16 With an eye to the future, the SAL Executive Board, working in consultation with the Investment Committee, has given approval in principle for the purchase of office space in proximity to the Supreme Court. Given the current volatility in the investment market, this will also result in the diversification of a part of the Academy’s investment assets into real estate. The move will enable the Academy to house its operational units at its own premises instead of paying

rent to the Supreme Court. We hope to have more certainty on some of these ideas in the coming months and I will speak more about their development in my Opening of Legal Year Speech in January. The Secretariat will also share our plans and ideas with Committee members in the coming months.

Conclusion

17 Looking ahead, I am confident that the Academy will continue to weave a colourful tapestry of success and excellence in our legal sector. Thank you all for your generous and unwavering support that has brought us to this point and will continue to carry us forward into the future.

18 We look forward to seeing you again next year and I wish all of you a pleasant evening.