

STATEMENT BY CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON ON BEHALF OF THE SINGAPORE JUDICIARY ON THE DEMISE OF FOUNDING PRIME MINISTER MR LEE KUAN YEW

23 March 2015 - The Judiciary joins the nation in mourning the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore and a much admired and respected member of the Singapore Bar.

2 The late Mr Lee was called to the Singapore Bar on 7 August 1951 and practised law until he took office as Prime Minister in 1959. Thereafter, Mr Lee continued to be deeply interested in the development of Singapore’s legal profession and our legal system.

3 In a speech he delivered in 1962, Mr Lee reminded members of the Bench and the Bar of the need to discharge their respective roles and responsibilities ably so as to ensure that our judicial and legal system worked fairly and expeditiously for the benefit of all in society. In Mr Lee’s vision for Singapore, the strength and vitality of the legal system, including first-rate law schools, a strong and able profession and an outstanding Legal Service led by a free, independent and incorrupt judiciary, were matters of the first importance. Mr Lee was a lifelong champion of the rule of law and from the outset of his tenure as Prime Minister he set out to eradicate corruption in public institutions. To Mr Lee, the worth of a legal system was to be assessed not simply by the greatness or grandeur of its theoretical underpinnings, but more importantly, by whether it operated well at a practical level to ensure order and justice in dealings among citizens and also in the relationship between the citizenry and the State. These ideals remain relevant to the Judiciary and to our society today, as we persevere in our quest to ensure that justice is fair and accessible to all.

4 Mr Lee was a keen proponent of continuous learning and development which he saw as essential if we, in the legal profession, were to meet the challenges of globalisation successfully. He also believed that the quality of our legal services sector and the values of the legal profession would be strengthened if judges, senior lawyers and other members of the wider legal community would come together to mentor younger lawyers and inspire them with a passion for and a lifelong commitment to doing right by all. This led to the establishment of the Singapore Academy of Law (SAL) in 1988. In his speech at the opening of the SAL in 1990, Mr Lee observed that “the Bar must be international in outlook because Singapore’s business is international”. More than a quarter of a century later, the SAL continues in its endeavour to ensure that the legal fraternity remains up-to-date with the latest legal developments from across the world so that it is well-placed to learn from the best of these and to incorporate them within our system.

5 We, in the Judiciary, express our deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathies to the family of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Our thoughts are with them at this difficult time.