

Singapore Academy of Law Appreciation Dinner 2017
Speech of the Honourable Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

11 July 2017

Introduction

1 Ladies and gentlemen, a very good evening to all of you and thank you very much indeed for joining us this evening for the Academy's annual Appreciation Dinner. It is always a delightful occasion for me to welcome and to address our guests at the Appreciation Dinner. This is a tradition that was initiated by my predecessor, Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong. He did this because he recognised that the Academy of Law is heavily dependent on the goodwill of its volunteers to discharge its mission. As that mission has grown over the years, it is unsurprising that our guest list of those to whom we are indebted has similarly grown. We started with a guest list of 120 in 2007 and tonight, I am most delighted to welcome some 260 of you who have been instrumental in advancing the Academy's interests over the course of the past year.

2 This evening, let me begin by extending my heartiest congratulations and best wishes to Academy Publishing and to the Singapore Mediation Centre. Some of you may recall that 2007 was also the year when Chief Justice Chan launched Academy Publishing and it is my great pleasure to note how well Academy Publishing has done

in its first 10 years! I also congratulate the Singapore Mediation Centre, which was formed by the SAL to promote mediation services for civil disputes in the High Court, on celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. The SMC has played a transformational role in entrenching mediation as a critical part of our dispute resolution landscape and we are deeply grateful to all those who have played a part in this remarkable achievement.

3 When the Academy was established in 1988, we were occupied mainly with publishing a journal and a newsletter for members, organising seminars, and running a restaurant to feed hungry judges and lawyers. Almost 3 decades later, our role in the legal community has evolved and expanded significantly; we are not only involved in providing opportunities for continuing professional development, but are also engaged in promoting Singapore as a centre for dispute resolution and harnessing technology to improve efficiency. This transformation of the Academy's role would not have been possible without many of you sacrificing your time and devoting your efforts to help the Academy in its many initiatives. In the time that remains, let me briefly outline some of the key developments we can expect as we look ahead.

Preparing the legal sector for the future

4 At last year's Appreciation Dinner and at this year's Opening of the Legal Year, I spoke about how the technological advancements could significantly disrupt existing legal practice models, and why our lawyers must respond strategically and effectively.

5 These challenges loom larger with each passing day. Technology is revolutionising the practice of law through machine learning and automation. An example in the litigation context is ROSS, an artificial intelligence (AI) subscription-based service, which responds to questions by scanning through its database and producing an answer with relevant references to sources that include legislation and case law. ROSS also monitors the law around the clock to notify users of relevant new decisions. Such developments inevitably will have a substantial effect on lawyers as well as on their clients.

6 For consumers of legal services, the technological advancements that have led to the commoditisation of some of these services are heartening; these consumers will increasingly rely on AI for some of the solutions they seek instead of instinctively approaching their lawyers. But, this may not be such good news for the *providers* of legal services if they do not adapt to these new realities.

7 It is against this backdrop that the Academy and its committees have begun, in the past year, to work on various initiatives to equip the legal community to be future- and technology-ready. There are already thriving legal tech communities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Israel and India, among others. We need to ensure that our legal services sector remains vibrant and competitive and to this end, our stakeholders, including practitioners, in-house counsel, legal support staff and law students, must embrace the disruptive changes brought about by technology.

Legal Technology Vision

8 The Academy's work in equipping the legal community to be future- and technology-ready is reflected in the Legal Technology Vision, which was announced at the Opening of this Legal Year. It describes the future for legal technology in Singapore, and the five-year developmental roadmap that the Academy will undertake along with its partners to make these aspirations a reality. The announcement of the Legal Technology Vision has generated significant worldwide interest and encouraged many players to come forward to offer innovative solutions.

9 Some of you may recall the four pillars of the Legal Technology Vision that were also unveiled at the Opening, namely, Baseline Technology Adoption, Enhanced Services, Innovative Services and Legal Technology Acceleration. I am pleased to say that the Baseline Technology Adoption pillar has already progressed significantly

under the guidance and stewardship of the Law Society and the Ministry of Law, with the launches of Tech Start for Law (TSL) and SmartLaw Assist schemes in March. TSL provides 70% grant funding to law firms that adopt approved baseline productivity tools; while, SmartLaw Assist is an education fund subsidy scheme that aims to increase utilization of online knowledge databases. Academy Publishing is offering its premium content with a further discount on top of the SmartLaw Assist subsidy, which means that law firms can save as much as 90% when they subscribe to its premium content under the scheme.

Future Law Innovation Programme (FLIP)

10 The Academy will also soon launch the Future Law Innovation Programme (FLIP). This looks to give form and substance to the Legal Technology Vision by helping to develop “the model for the delivery of legal services in the future economy.” A committee headed by Justice Lee Sei Kin has been hard at work developing FLIP, which is scheduled for launch in the fourth quarter of this year. Let me touch briefly on the aims and the key features of FLIP.

Aims

11 FLIP will prepare our legal community to become future-ready by implementing the *Adopting, Improving, Adapting and Inventing* model within the Legal Technology Vision. FLIP will :

- (a) assist law firms in integrating baseline technology into their processes;
- (b) facilitate the cross-pollination of ideas between the tech and legal sectors and help law firms to free up resources that can then be channelled into business innovation; and
- (c) organise and develop Singapore's legal technology ecosystem.

Features

12 FLIP will execute its objectives by a three-phase innovation roadmap with three key components:

(1) Co-Working Space

13 First, to establish a hub for legal innovation, FLIP will establish a co-working space offering shared services and facilities. This will be at Collision 8, an innovative serviced office located at High Street Centre just opposite the Supreme Court. Collision 8 is currently home to start-ups from various other sectors. The co-working space will provide the platform for participating law firms to boost productivity by helping them to lighten their back-end operations and move towards paper-light processes. The resulting savings can then be channelled into more productive uses.

14 The Academy will work with Collision 8 to customise the working space for lawyers and to supplement the generic business support services that are already provided to other tenants with the baseline legal technologies and law firm-focused support services. The initial response in informal consultations has been encouraging, and in the coming weeks, the Academy will step up the promotion of this initiative. The Academy also intends to tap on the expertise of the large law firms and English barristers' chambers to address issues of confidentiality that may affect law firms using shared services.

(2) Virtual Community Platform

15 Second, a culture of collaboration is essential for innovation. To enable this, the Academy aims to set up the Virtual Community Platform (VCP), a virtual extension of the physical FLIP community environment. This free online platform will serve as the nexus for legal professionals to engage one another as well as external stakeholders (such as public and non-legal entities) and service providers. The platform will allow participants to set up an online profile, try out new legal technology tools, access training and mentorship, subscribe to legal support and legal technology services and seek opportunities for collaboration. This will be open to all stakeholders in the legal community, including practitioners, in-house counsels, academics and students.

(3) Accelerator

16 Finally, the Academy hopes to promote Singapore's first legal sector-specific accelerator to groom promising legal tech start-ups and to incubate new business models or services conceived by law firms. This bespoke accelerator for legal tech start-ups and other Future Law enterprises will address an existing gap in the way that new ideas for delivering legal services are commercialised, which exists in part because investors often overlook legal tech start-ups. The Academy will look to link promising legal tech start-ups with law firms, the general counsel community, technology leaders and curated investors. The Academy will also provide experienced business mentors and work with SPRING to help participants commercialise and internationalise their start-ups. Through the accelerator, the Academy hopes to catalyse an investment ecosystem to support legal tech and future law ventures.

Value for law firms

17 What then is the value proposition for the firms involved? For the larger law firms, FLIP will provide the opportunity to extend their in-house innovation efforts to the wider legal community and even the technology community. The larger firms will be able to exercise leadership through mentoring and investing in legal tech start-ups. For the smaller law firms, FLIP will help them adopt technologies that will make them more efficient and productive. All this promises to be most exciting, though there is much work yet to be done.

The Academy's rebranding

18 Next, let me turn to something I touched on at last year's Appreciation Dinner. I mentioned then that we were making various efforts to better serve our community. As part of this, the Academy has carried out a rebranding exercise to clarify its mandate, to align all our strategies and initiatives in line with our statutory mission. I am pleased to share with you the end product of this rebranding exercise.

19 We have crystallised the Academy's mandate into our own version of the 4Cs:

- Creating knowledge and know-how;
- Catalysing ideas, insights and innovation;
- Capability building with tools and technology; and
- Connecting the legal community.

Creating knowledge and know-how

20 In terms of the first 'C', creating knowledge and know-how, the Academy has developed a strong reputation for offering comprehensive, up-to-date legal content through a variety of channels including the LawNet database, and books, journals and law reports from Academy Publishing. The Academy will continue to invest in

intellectual property, make its IP available to the profession and promote public access to legal information and updates through Singaporelaw.sg and Singapore Law Watch.

21 And within this same object of advancing our knowledge base, this year, the Academy also launched a new undergraduate scholarship at both the NUS Faculty of Law and the SMU School of Law. These two high-value needs-based scholarships give outstanding students the opportunity to read law at our local universities.

Catalysing ideas, insights and innovation

22 For the second 'C', catalysing ideas, insights and innovation, the Academy will promote a collaborative and dynamic environment and assist the legal community in adapting quickly to new realities. FLIP is a prime example of how the Academy will play an active part in the innovation-driven Legal Technology Vision. Another example is the Academy's role in promoting Singapore law. We are working closely with The Committee on the Future Economy to promote the use of Singapore law by seeking the adoption of Singapore law clauses in specific standard-form contracts.

Capability building with tools and technology

23 The third 'C', capability building with tools and technology, recognises that one of the Academy's core functions is to equip lawyers to deliver better quality services to their clients. Some of our new capability-building initiatives include the Specialist

Accreditation Scheme which recognises expertise and experience in certain specialised areas of law, and the Legal Industry Framework for Training and Education (LIFTED), which supports the ongoing learning and professional development of the legal community.

24 The Specialist Accreditation Scheme was officially launched at the Opening of this Legal Year and the first batch of Building and Construction Accredited Specialist candidates are currently undergoing the accreditation process, with the Senior Accredited Specialist candidates to follow suit in the second half of this year. The first batch of specialists will be announced at the start of 2018. The Shipping Specialist Accreditation Sub-committee, headed by Justice Steven Chong, is currently working on the accreditation framework for shipping lawyers that we hope to launch next year.

25 And in April and May this year, we held the LIFTED Casual Conversations with different stakeholders to help us identify the competencies needed for a future-ready legal profession that can respond to the practical realities facing us. Three broad points came up in these sessions: the need for lawyers to broaden their knowledge and skills beyond the law; the need to collaborate strategically and share successes and experiences so that the profession can grow the pie; and the need to explore new avenues of pursuing professional development and experiment with new formats of learning. The pilot LIFTED competency maps, structured training programmes and

learning needs analysis tools will enable learners to pursue these imperatives through informed choices about what to learn and how.

26 In line with our role in capability building, I am also pleased to note that the second edition of the SAL-INSEAD Law Firm Leadership Programme was successfully completed, with 30 partners from large, medium-sized and small firms attending, including a few from the region who flew in.

Connecting all in the legal community and the public

27 The final 'C' relates to connecting all within the legal community and with the public. As an institution with a large membership base, the Academy is uniquely positioned to build the bridges linking legal practitioners, members of the judiciary, regulators and consumers of legal services. The Academy will endeavour to bring together the best minds and tap on the best ideas to address the challenges facing the legal profession. We have our annual lectures, conferences, seminars, workshops, and moot competitions. Soon, we will have the Virtual Community Platform under the FLIP. We will continue to foster public-private partnerships and establish thought leadership in issues that are important to the legal industry.

28 The Academy also continues to connect with the community through our corporate social responsibility efforts. Last year, we raised \$202,400 for the Yellow

Ribbon Fund-SAL STAR Bursary. The Bursary is a key programme that helps ex-offenders get training for jobs so that they regain their purpose in life, earn a living and rebuild their confidence.

29 With these strategic projects, it is important for the Academy to communicate our work more effectively with all our stakeholders. To this end, we have revamped our main website to enable us to convey the key components of our work more clearly. There is more work to be done and we seek your patience and understanding as we continue to improve different aspects of our digital space. We have also worked on a new corporate logo with the SAL initials that I will unveil in a few minutes. This will feature on the Academy's collaterals and events, while the original SAL crest will remain as our insignia of title for credentialing purposes and for our certificates of awards.

Conclusion

30 I close my remarks tonight by reiterating the Academy's commitment to working with you, our partners, to continue pushing the boundaries of excellence in the Singapore legal services sector.

31 I thank you once again, on behalf of the Academy, for your commitment and service in the past year, and I look forward to seeing you again next year. I wish you all a most enjoyable evening.