

EMBARGOED

Speech by the President of the Law Society of Singapore, Mass Call 2013, 27 July 2013

May it please your Honour, I speak on behalf of the Law Society to welcome the cohort of 2013 to the Singapore Bar.

Today's ceremony marks and celebrates the admission of 412 new members to the roll of advocates and solicitors of the Supreme Court of Singapore. It is a record for new admissions by a rather long shot. The previous high of 363 was achieved in 2012. However, the fact of this new record should not in any way diminish the significance of what you have all individually achieved thus far. If anything, the growing numbers of our lawyers emphasises the increasing demands of our society for the services of our profession.

Recently, the 4th Committee on the Supply of Lawyers headed by Judge of Appeal, Justice VK Rajah, released its report. I am sure it is one report you all would have reviewed with the same degree of passionate, careful scrutiny you would have accorded to all major cases on your reading lists through law school. Not least because the recommendations of this committee will have important repercussions on the landscape of the profession in the years to come.

One of the important recommendations of the report is for the creation of a third local law school with a focus on training and equipping lawyers keen on practising community and criminal law. The press, the media, members of the profession and the public have all weighed in with their views, suggestions and queries on this report.

To me, this recommendation stands out for its commitment to fortifying the practices on community and criminal law. It is a reassuring reminder to us all that in the midst of the push for regionalisation and for a bigger share of the regional as well as international dispute resolution and transactional pie, the Bar's relevance and contribution to its home base and its community will not be forgotten. In the pursuit of professional achievements on a regional or international stage, this is a great assurance to everyone, especially to young lawyers like you, that professional aspirations can also be fully realised through a vibrant practice that makes community and criminal justice even more accessible to the man in the street. It signals an important commitment to investing talent and resources to better serve the interests of the average Singaporean; it says loudly and clearly that these interests and the lawyers who serve them are important to and are not necessarily second class to the interests of big businesses.

A short while ago, you all donned the Court gown and recited the declaration to conduct yourselves according to the highest standards in your service to Court and to client. The gown and the declaration both point the lawyer towards the high ideals of the profession. Like the white coat which identifies the doctor in a hospital, the black Court gown identifies the lawyer as an officer of the Court. It conveys the seriousness of the Court proceedings and emphasises the solemnity of the lawyer's duty. The declaration sets out the ethical and professional template upon which that duty is to be discharged.

Ladies and Gentlemen, by being called to the Bar, you are now officers of the Supreme Court of Singapore. In the Courtroom, there is an area close to the Bench which is accessed only by the people who have business before the Court, ie the legal counsel, the prosecution and the parties to the litigation. There is a physical divide to close this area off from members of the public or from those who have no direct business in the dispute before the Court. As an advocate and solicitor, your client's business and the interest of justice are your business. Hence with this call, from this day forth, the Bench will beckon you to cross that

divide where you will conduct your client's business, help the work of the Court and advance the cause of Justice, as an advocate and solicitor of the Court. As you do so, may you always act justly and with courage to do what is right, honourable and just.

The words of that great American poet and writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson are apt for today's occasion:

Don't waste life in doubts and fears; spend yourself on the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be that best preparation for the hours and ages that will follow it.

I therefore challenge you all to work hard, to conduct yourself rightly and to sow expectantly of a long, satisfying and successful career in the legal profession. There is room in this profession for all of you, and I hope there will be room in your practice for every deserving party regardless of his or her status in Society.

To welcome you to the Bar, I am pleased to invite you and your parents to a reception hosted by the Law Society after this ceremony. There is a photo booth where you can have a complimentary photo taken, and we have also prepared a welcome gift for you. So please collect your goodie bag with the photo voucher at the Law Society's booth.

Finally, my heartiest congratulations to all of you and to your loved ones here today on your admission to the roll of Advocates and Solicitors of the Supreme Court of Singapore.

Lok Vi Ming, Senior Counsel
President
The Law Society of Singapore