



The Law Society of Singapore  
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## **OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2024**

### **ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE, MS LISA SAM HUI MIN**

1. May it please Your Honour, the Chief Justice, the Attorney-General, Justices of Appeal, Judges, and Judicial Commissioners.
2. I am honoured to welcome the following overseas Bar leaders and representatives:
  - a. Ms. Karen Cheah, the President of the Malaysian Bar;
  - b. Mr. Nazim Maduarin and Mr. Roger Chin, the President and the Immediate Past President of the Sabah Law Society respectively;
  - c. Mr. Gurvir Singh Sandhu, the President of the Advocates Association of Sarawak;
  - d. Ms. Nur Azizah Ahmad, the President of the Law Society of Brunei Darussalam;
  - e. Senior Counsel Victor Dawes and Senior Counsel Jose Maurellet, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association respectively;
  - f. Mr. C. M. Chan, the President of the Law Society of Hong Kong;
  - g. Ms. Zhou Xuan, the Vice President of Guangdong Lawyers Association;
  - h. Mr. Huang Shan, the President of the Guangzhou Lawyers Association and Director of the Belt and Road International Lawyers Association's Guangzhou Center;
  - i. Mr. Huang Ningning, the Vice President of the Shanghai Bar Association;
  - j. Ms. Masako Takahata, the Vice-Chair of the International Committee of Daini Tokyo Bar Association;

- k. Mr. Shyam Divan and Mr. Yap Teong Liang, the President and the President-Elect of LAWASIA respectively; and
- l. Mr. Kirindeep Singh, the Inter-Pacific Bar Association's Jurisdictional Council Member for Singapore.

### **Appointments and Departures**

- 3. Firstly, the Bar extends its gratitude to Justice Quentin Loh, Justice Andrew Ang and Justice Lai Siu Chiu, who all recently completed their terms as Senior Judges, marking an end to their distinguished service on the Bench. We wish them success in their future endeavours.
- 4. The legal profession witnessed last year several notable judicial appointments, some of which will take place this year:
  - (a) Justice Belinda Ang Saw Ean's appointment as Justice of the Court of Appeal was extended.
  - (b) Justice See Kee Oon was appointed as Judge of the Appellate Division of the High Court.
  - (c) Justice Tan Siong Thye, Justice Judith Prakash and Justice Lee Seiu Kin were appointed as Senior Judges.
  - (d) Justice Chan Seng Onn's and Justice Andrew Phang Boon Leong's appointments as Senior Judges, as well as Justice Choo Han Teck's, Justice Dedar Singh Gill's and Justice Chua Lee Ming's appointments as Judges of the Supreme Court, were extended.
  - (e) We also welcome two High Court Judges: Justice Goh Yihan and Justice Teh Hwee Hwee, and three new Judicial Commissioners: Judicial Commissioner Wong Li Kok, Alex, Judicial Commissioner Tan Pheng Wee Christopher, and Judicial Commissioner Tan Ruyan Kristy.

- (f) Justice Teh was concurrently appointed the Presiding Judge of the Family Justice Courts.
  - (g) Justice Vincent Hoong Seng Lei's appointment as the Presiding Judge of the State Courts was extended; and
  - (h) Two Singapore International Commercial Court Judges were appointed: Justice James Michael Peck of the United States of America and Justice James Leslie Bain Allsop of Australia.
5. On behalf of the Law Society, we extend our best wishes to your Honours and look forward to appearing before you.
  6. Last year, the profession mourned the loss of its beloved late President, Mr. Adrian Tan. Some of us were fortunate to interact with Adrian frequently. Like everyone, we cherished Adrian's insightful views on any topic and issue.
  7. Adrian was generous. He always had a kind word for someone and a knack for reframing issues, so well. We will miss Adrian as a loyal friend, a dedicated lawyer, and an inspiring President.
  8. The Law Society of Singapore is committed to continuing Adrian's legacy and advocating for the best traditions of the bar to be preserved.
  9. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Senior Counsel Jason Chan, with whom I had the pleasure of partnering closely as Co-Vice President of the Law Society. Jason stepped up as President following Adrian's passing.

## **Reinventing the Singapore Lawyer**

10. The legal landscape has changed dramatically in the past few years. Two significant trends stand out. The COVID-19 pandemic changed lawyers' working patterns. Generative AI promises to be a game-changer in the legal services. It is timely for the legal profession to consider how to reinvent itself to meet future challenges. To do this, we must ask ourselves: who is the Singapore lawyer, and how should the Singapore lawyer reinvent himself or herself?
11. From my long experience serving on the Council of the Law Society, I have had the opportunity to interact with members of the Bar of all ages and in many different forums. I believe the Singapore lawyer is characterised by sincerity, client-centeredness, professional and ethical conduct, reasonable expertise, a heart for the community, and a dedication to his or her clients' well-being.
12. Internationally, the Singapore Lawyer is Asian at heart but with a global outlook. The Singapore Lawyer possesses a profound cross-cultural understanding, serving as a bridge between the East and West. With this deep cultural awareness, Singapore Lawyers firmly believe that social and business harmony and cooperation are the cornerstones of socioeconomic prosperity.
13. Parties trust Singapore Lawyers because they are adept at balancing competing individual, business, societal, and national interests in complex legal matters. For several years, the Law Society has publicised these attributes of the Singapore Lawyer Brand in its overseas missions, with the support of the Ministry of Law.
14. This year, the Law Society will do more to build on the Singapore Lawyers Brand. We will fortify the Singapore Lawyer Brand in three main areas: (a) strengthening our Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) initiatives; (b) reskilling and upskilling our members in emerging practice areas; and (c) addressing succession planning in the legal profession for our younger and more senior members of the Bar.

**(A) ADR initiatives**

15. A Singapore lawyer may ably represent his or her client and advocate for the client's case in a court or tribunal in the morning and seamlessly transition to a mediator or arbitrator, impartially presiding over a mediation session or arbitration hearing in the afternoon.
16. Equipping lawyers with ADR skills is equally essential for transactional lawyers. Corporate lawyers consistently employ people management skills to negotiate terms, defuse boardroom tensions, and resolve shareholder conflicts.
17. With technological advances and the surge in online transactions, many clients seek legal expertise to swiftly and accurately assess the pros and cons of settling a legal dispute before embarking on a full-blown dispute resolution process. This presents an opportune moment for lawyers to address this growing demand for an honest and reliable pre-action assessment through ADR.
18. The Law Society will adopt a two-pronged approach to facilitate this. First, we will collaborate with stakeholders to promote streamlined domestic arbitration procedures, neutral evaluation, and specialised ADR processes, which will offer opportunities for our members to enhance their ADR skills. We will also roll out Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses and training programs for these specialised ADR processes.
19. Second, we will continue to explore and expand our ADR schemes to various areas. The Law Society recently launched the Community Mediation and Neutral Evaluation Scheme to help resolve community disputes. There is room for lawyer-led community ADR programs to foster understanding and restore harmony in the Singaporean community. Knowing the ground and assisting the community nurtures the legal profession's soul. To support our younger lawyers in this initiative, we plan to have older lawyers mentor younger lawyers in the Law Society's ADR process.

20. Another specialised scheme is the Law Society Mediation Scheme and Neutral Evaluation Scheme (Family Module), which assists parties (with or without representation) on family matters. The Law Society Personal Injury and Property Damage Mediation Scheme is in the works, a hybrid scheme using mediation and neutral evaluation with the insurance companies' buy-in.
21. We also collaborate with external stakeholders on ADR initiatives, including foreign bar associations. We will disclose more details this year. Most recently, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Singapore Estate Agents Association on 14 November 2023 to resolve real estate agency and real estate agent disputes. We will continue to actively promote the use of its ADR schemes in businesses and industry sectors.
22. I am pleased to announce that the Law Society Mediation Scheme is now a certified Registered Service Provider by the Singapore International Mediation Institute. We will soon announce revised rules designed to provide more opportunities for our members to develop their mediation skills.

**(B) Upskilling and Reskilling Lawyers**

23. In the rapidly changing legal landscape, lawyers must upskill and reskill to navigate profound structural changes anticipated in the market for legal services. The Law Society plans to undertake projects to enhance lawyers' skills in five key areas. These areas are Family Wealth Advisory, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), Digital Assets, Legal Tech, and Sports Law. I will touch on each of these areas briefly.
24. First, **Family Wealth Advisory**. Family businesses represent the world's oldest and most prevalent form of business organisation. They encompass a spectrum, from small- and medium-sized enterprises to large conglomerates operating across multiple industries. In many countries, family businesses account for over 70 per cent of all businesses and play a pivotal role in economic growth and employment.

25. However, in many cases, the lifespan of most family businesses extends only to the founder's generation. A staggering 95 per cent of family businesses only survive within the third generation of ownership. Lawyers can assume a critical role in guiding subsequent generations to manage better the demands of an expanding business and a much larger family, thereby ensuring the sustainability of their enterprise.
26. This involves advising family businesses on implementing appropriate governance structures and proposing frameworks and practices to mitigate their unique corporate challenges. All law firms, regardless of size, have opportunities to enhance their capacity and establish a Family Wealth Advisory practice. We will collaborate with various stakeholders to develop and implement specialised courses tailored to the needs of lawyers in this field. These courses will be designed with concision, efficiency, and practicality, acknowledging lawyers' demanding schedules and multifaceted commitments.
27. Second, **ESG**. Considering the origins of ESG, it is unsurprising that deep expertise in this field is primarily concentrated overseas. Local proficiency in ESG is typically confined to a few larger legal and accounting entities. New lawyers generally need more expertise to provide sustainability services. Also, environmental law is not a compulsory subject in institutions of higher learning. Given the anticipated mandatory climate reporting and standards, phased increase in ESG regulation, and carbon border tariffs, there is a pressing need for rapid capacity building in sustainability.

28. I am delighted to share that on 5 January 2024, the Law Society entered into a collaboration with the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants on the Sustainability Apex Programme. With the support of Enterprise SG, this three-year initiative aims to enhance the competitiveness of law firms in sustainability-related services, encompassing advisory, reporting, and assurance, extending beyond SGX-listed companies. We will organise a series of masterclasses, workshops, roundtables, and community-building activities, such as networking sessions, fireside chats, and overseas business missions to engage with leading industry thought leaders for the legal profession.
29. Third, **Digital Assets**. Digital assets revolutionise the Web and are the new frontier in finance. These assets represent value digitally and exist in various forms. Understanding these assets, the pros and cons of employing them, and valuation considerations are critical for a modern lawyer.
30. As the blockchain industry continues to expand and mature, the proliferation of digital assets will continue. This presents many opportunities for enterprises to create value, enhance interactions and streamline operations. Lawyers must maintain their knowledge of these valuable digital assets to ensure their safekeeping and pre-empt or mitigate associated risks. These developments offer many opportunities for the modern lawyer in the 21st century.
31. The Law Society, in collaboration with external stakeholders, will organise training sessions to educate lawyers on the types, risk profiles, and value of these digital assets, which are crucial for disputes and transactional lawyers. This effort aims to prepare lawyers for the rapidly evolving financial landscape, where our perception of value will transform. We will periodically offer bite-sized talks and seminars for lawyers addressing digital assets and associated financial stability risks. This recognises the need to safeguard consumers, investors, and businesses while fostering innovation.



32. Fourth, **Legal Tech**. Generative Artificial Intelligence (or Gen AI) was the buzzword of 2023. The Law Society recently established an AI Working Group to investigate the potential impact of AI and its associated tools on the practice of law in Singapore for the immediate term (i.e., the next two years) and the mid-term (i.e., from two to five years) and where feasible, the working group will also consider the longer-term impact of AI (i.e., beyond five years), including the potential opportunities and pitfalls that may arise from adopting AI tools.
33. I am pleased to announce that this year's Litigation Conference will feature an exciting line-up of topics on AI concerning its impact on litigation practice, the use of technology tools, and how AI will affect young-lawyers. We hope you will join us for our annual marquee event scheduled for 3 and 4 April 2024.
34. We will also organise a series of ongoing dialogues to share developments with other foreign and international bar associations on adopting and using AI tools in their respective countries and their impact on legal practice. In addition, we will offer courses on related AI topics to raise awareness of AI tools and how lawyers can effectively and ethically deploy them by following existing professional conduct rules. Novel legal issues arising from AI, such as those surrounding intellectual property, will be covered.
35. Finally, **Sports Law**. This topic holds a special place in my heart as an avid participant in the Law Society's sporting events. Given the growing prominence of sports on national and international levels, we should look to developing our lawyers' sports law capabilities. Key areas where lawyers can enhance their skills include the application of dispute resolution mechanisms in sports disputes, the role of lawyers in sports governance and safeguarding athletes from issues related to drugs, gambling, and corruption. The Law Society's Sports Committee will collaborate with our other practice committees to examine these areas and consider the broader impact of sports on legal practice.

**(C) Succession: The Younger Members of the Bar**

36. The importance of succession planning in the legal profession cannot be understated. I will begin with the younger members of the Bar. They possess immense potential to surpass our achievements. With the proper support, encouragement, and guidance, I am confident that our profession will emerge more robust and more resilient than ever, upholding our core values of Professionalism, Integrity, and Justice.
37. Younger lawyers today will seek alternative resources if their needs are not addressed promptly. They face significant financial burdens due to housing costs, require job opportunities, and seek mentorship. They often need more training in business operations, law office management, and the practical aspects of law practice. They also need to be mindful of ethical issues and practice pitfalls. The Law Society will be the go-to resource for younger lawyers in all these areas. We will continue to build on our existing suite of programmes tailored for younger lawyers, including financial planning, networking, interviewing skills, and risk management.
38. Younger lawyers are also seeking guidance within the profession. Recognising this need, the Law Society will initiate multiple programmes to assist younger lawyers, and will cover three main areas: (1) cultivating a supportive environment through Mentorship Schemes; (2) leveraging technology and providing networking opportunities; (3) maintaining a sustainable legal practice.

Law Society Mentorship Scheme and Women-in-Practice Group Mentoring Programme

39. While mentoring relationships cannot be forced, cultivating a supportive environment is critical. Mentoring our junior members and fostering a conducive environment for mentorship are crucial elements of a thriving legal profession. Launched in August 2023, the Law Society Mentorship Scheme connects mentees with volunteer mentors from a broader pool outside of the Mentees' immediate workplace network. This initiative fosters confidential discussions on various topics, including ethical dilemmas, practice-area concerns, mental well-being, and career development.
40. The Mentorship Scheme also allows the mentee to engage in reverse mentoring of emerging technology and social media knowledge with the mentor, subject to their mutual consent. The mentor and mentee have the flexibility to decide on the structure of the meetings to their best interests, especially about specific learning goals, preferences and mentoring styles.
41. Complementing this initiative, the Women-In-Practice Committee's Group Mentoring Programme, running since 2019, targets explicitly junior women lawyers. This programme promotes peer learning and mentorship, providing a platform for mentees to raise practice-related questions, seek insights, and learn from the experiences of their peers and seniors.

Leveraging Technology and providing Networking Opportunities

42. Several junior and middle category Council members will spearhead initiatives that leverage technology for younger lawyers. Networking opportunities with overseas bar associations will be incorporated into webinars, teleconferences, web posts, or archives filled with valuable information for younger lawyers to learn at their own pace.

43. We will create overseas networking opportunities for younger lawyers, such as the inaugural session of the annual Singapore-Malaysia Young Lawyers Conference, which will occur on 29 February 2024. In addition, there will be an Exchange Programme with young Hong Kong Bar Association barristers. This will foster cross-cultural learning and elevate our younger lawyers' professional proficiency in litigation or arbitration. The working group will explore more potential areas of collaboration with foreign bar associations. More details will be revealed this year.

#### *Maintaining a Sustainable Legal Practice*

44. The Law Society is committed to safeguarding its members' mental and social well-being, particularly younger members. Many lawyers work long hours, often extending into weekends, public holidays, and overseas family vacations. We have also observed Judges and Judicial Officers dedicating long and late hours to their duties. This is evidenced by asynchronous hearing applications filed at 7.30 pm and approved by Judges at 9.30 pm on the same night. These round-the-clock working hours come at a cost, often disrupting the balance and harmony between our other commitments as parents, children to ageing parents, siblings or family members to other family members in need, and as volunteers.
45. To alleviate this situation, the Council will be looking to release a Sustainable Practice Guidance Note, recommended by the Civil Practice Committee, as an initial step. This guidance note aims to assist member practitioners in maintaining a sustainable legal practice while adhering to existing legal and ethical obligations owed to the Court. Such a guidance note also seeks to minimise the need for time extensions and assist in the fair and efficient administration of justice.

**(D) Succession: Senior Members of the Bar**

46. Singapore's ageing population is one of the clear demographic trends in the coming years. Singaporeans enjoy one of the highest life expectancies in the world. In 2022, the average life expectancy for male Singapore residents was 80.7 years, while for female residents, it was 85.2 years.
47. With increased longevity, many lawyers between the ages of 55 and 70 do not feel "old enough" for traditional retirement as defined by lawyers of previous generations. As a result, many lawyers are seeking to extend their careers. For some, continuing to work is a financial necessity. Older lawyers are not eager to be forced out of practice. Instead, they prefer to gradually reduce their hours and contribute in the most effective ways possible. They can bring immense value to their firms. Their ability to serve as mentors and repositories of institutional knowledge is unparalleled.
48. We now stand at a cross-generational demographic of the Singapore legal profession. It is an opportune moment to foster closer collaboration between our younger and older lawyers. The values and aspirations of many younger lawyers differ significantly from those of their predecessors. They prioritise work-life balance, seeking to establish families and actively participate in their children's lives rather than solely focusing on their careers as providers. They challenge the notion that the legal profession demands exceptionally long hours, seeking a more balanced approach to their work-life commitments.
49. These younger lawyers envision establishing law firms that offer them the flexibility to manage multiple demands effectively. They recognise the gap between the theoretical knowledge from law schools and the practical aspects of running a law firm. They seek opportunities to network and build relationships with more experienced lawyers, not necessarily through formal mentoring programs but through organic interactions and collaborative endeavours.

### Directory to connect younger and older lawyers

50. To align the expectations and needs of both new and established generations of lawyers, the Law Society will develop a directory that connects (a) younger lawyers who may be hesitant to establish their independent law firms due to a lack of office space and administrative support; with (b) older lawyers who possess the resources and capacity to mentor and guide younger lawyers in setting up their practices.
  
51. Younger lawyers can expedite the launch of their entrepreneurial journeys by accessing essential law firm infrastructure, including but not limited to paralegal and clerical support, financial and audit expertise, practice management and support services, or simply using a suitable address or phone number for professional purposes. Older lawyers can share their wealth of knowledge with their younger counterparts, serving as trainers or mentors to provide informal orientation, advice, and guidance on running a law firm. Additionally, reverse mentoring opportunities can be fostered, allowing younger lawyers to keep older lawyers up-to-date on emerging technologies and practice areas. A natural buddy system can also take place, enabling lawyers to stand-in for each other when necessary.

### Addressing the needs of older lawyers

52. As highlighted earlier in my speech, the initiatives for upskilling and reskilling lawyers and for lawyers to play a more significant role in ADR will be undertaken with the interest of older lawyers. We will be paying particular attention to the needs of older lawyers in the areas I have identified above and looking for models of successful ageing. We will explore options with older lawyers who are getting it right: ageing gracefully and ageing well.

53. Different lawyers will navigate these waters differently. This also requires us to have conversations on preparing early as legal professionals, assessing our strengths and weaknesses, identifying “passions”, making connections, building relationships, and financial planning. This will be part of our ongoing conversations within our legal profession and with overseas bar associations to help older lawyers navigate the changing practice settings and to maintain a sustainable legal practice.

### **Everything Starts With Your Home – the Secretariat**

54. Considering the expansion of the Law Society's membership to 6,570 as of 31 December 2023, we have professionalised the Law Society's service delivery to its members.
55. We are pleased to inform you that my Council has been diligently working on restructuring the Secretariat to enhance the Society's operations and corporate governance, promoting greater transparency and accountability to the Council. The newly restructured Secretariat is now led by a C-suite leadership comprising our Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Shawn Toh, our Chief Legal Officer, Mr. Alvin Chen, and our Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Chen Siew Loon, a Chartered Accountant.
56. The work I have outlined earlier is the culmination of a collaborative effort by numerous members of the Bar, the chairpersons of our various committees, the Secretariat staff and our Council members. We are also heartened by the unwavering support of our members, who readily assist us when approached to contribute to the Law Society and its members. We will continue working closely as a team, united in our vision for a more robust legal profession.
57. Ultimately, the Law Society must strive for excellence and uphold integrity, professionalism, and justice, reflecting the values of an honourable profession to enhance the Singapore Lawyer Brand and bring pride to Singapore.

## **Conclusion**

58. On behalf of the members of our Bar, I extend our best wishes for good health, wisdom, and fortitude in the year ahead to Your Honour, the Chief Justice, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Law, the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Law, and all members of the Judiciary. Our members pledge to uphold the rule of law and to assist the Court with diligence and integrity.
  
59. Thank you.

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