

# RESPONSE BY CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON

## OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2025

**Monday, 13 January 2025**

Mr Attorney,

Ms Sam,

Honoured guests,

Members of the Bar,

Ladies and gentlemen:

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Welcome to the Opening of this Legal Year. Let me first express my deep appreciation to the Honourable Chief Justice Professor Dr Sunarto and Justices I Gusti Agung Sumanatha and Syamsul Maarif, all of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia; the Honourable Khamphanh Bounphakhom, Deputy Chief Justice of The People's Supreme Court of the Lao PDR; the Honourable Anthony Fernando, President of the Court of Appeal of Seychelles; the Honourable Tan Sri Datuk Nallini Pathmanathan, Judge of the Federal Court of Malaysia; and His Honour Nicholas Andreatidis KC, Judge of the District Court of Queensland, who have travelled to Singapore, and to all our other guests for joining us today.
2. This Legal Year is special because it is also the year we celebrate 60 years of our nation's independence. While our history may be relatively short, it is a

colourful and dynamic story of our many communities and institutions, including, of course, our courts and legal system. These have been a foundational part of the broader Singapore story and, as I will shortly elaborate, the Judiciary and the profession will soon have the occasion to celebrate a very important milestone of our own. At the same time, we must not overlook the reality of our rapidly changing environment, and we must properly equip ourselves to meet it.

## **II. FELICITATIONS**

3. Let me begin with some customary acknowledgements. I warmly congratulate the following judges who joined our Bench over the past year:

(a) Judicial Commissioner Mohamed Faizal Mohamed Abdul Kadir, who was appointed to the General Division of the High Court; and

(b) Justices David Wolfe Rivkin, Peter Meier-Beck, Mary Howarth Arden, Anthony James Besanko and Anthony John Meagher, who were appointed as International Judges. The media has reported their appointments, and I will not rehearse the details of their illustrious careers. I will only say that each of them is an expert of the first order in commercial dispute resolution, and their joining the Singapore International Commercial Court (the "SICC") adds to the SICC's standing and quality. I am deeply grateful for their willingness to join us in furthering Singapore's contribution to the international commercial dispute resolution landscape.

4. Let me also express my deep appreciation to Justices Tay Yong Kwang and Woo Bih Li, who agreed to continue serving as a Justice of the Court of Appeal and a Judge of the Appellate Division of the High Court respectively, for a further term of two years each.
5. These appointments and extensions are part of the ongoing process of renewal and consolidation of our Bench, as we strive to blend deep experience with new perspectives and energy.
6. Let me also thank Deputy Attorney-General Goh Yihan, who has stepped down from the Bench to assume his present appointment. Mr Goh discharged his judicial duties with excellence. He made prolific contributions to our case law and also worked on several important initiatives. I am grateful to him and am certain that he will discharge his new duties with distinction.
7. I also congratulate you, Ms Sam, on your re-election. I look forward to continuing to strengthen the partnership between the Bench, the Bar and the Attorney-General's Chambers.

### **III. ETHICS AND THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION**

#### ***A. Observations on the profession's future***

8. Two years ago, I announced the establishment of the Ethics and Professional Standards Committee (the "Committee"), to develop a strategy to reinforce the moral centre and values of the profession. At the Opening of the last Legal

Year, I outlined the Committee's Interim Report.<sup>1</sup> The Committee has since completed its Final Report, and I have directed that this be published after this morning's proceedings.

9. The Reports provide a detailed overview of the profession's state and contain significant useful data gathered through surveys, focus group discussions and statistical analyses. Let me outline some key points.
10. First, the data suggests that the training and mentorship of young lawyers, including in ethics, have been impacted by the prevailing challenges and business realities affecting law firms. This applies across the spectrum of law firms but in different ways:
  - (a) To begin with, sole practitioners or smaller firms may find it more challenging to navigate the rapidly changing landscape, the growing interface between law and technology, and emerging competition from alternative providers and self-help tools that Ms Sam spoke about.<sup>2</sup> These realities give rise to growing financial pressures and resource constraints, which may require these lawyers to shoulder more administrative and operational responsibilities. They may thus find it more challenging to devote resources to establishing policies or protocols directed at promoting professional standards and transmitting ethical values.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sundaresh Menon CJ, Response at the Opening of the Legal Year 2024 (8 January 2024) ("OLY 2024 Response"), para 39-42: <<https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/news-and-resources/news/news-details/chief-justice-sundaresh-menon-response-delivered-at-the-opening-of-the-legal-year-2024>>.

<sup>2</sup> Ethics and Professional Standards Committee, "Interim Report of the Ethics and Professional Standards Committee" (15 December 2023) ("Interim Report") at para 2. Also see Ethics and Professional Standards Committee, "Final Report of the Ethics and Professional Standards Committee" (13 January 2025) ("Final Report") at paras 32 and 145.

<sup>3</sup> Final Report at para 32.

- (b) At the other end of the market, larger firms too face strong pressures, including high overheads and competition from international firms with considerable resources.
- (c) These pressures can strain the ability and willingness of firms to invest resources in matters that may not yield immediate financial returns, such as mentorship, careful and intentional on-the-job training, the building of a sustainable work culture and the transmission of values. The data appears to support this observation. A survey conducted by the Singapore Academy of Law (“SAL”) of lawyers with two to ten years of post-qualification experience revealed that just over a third of the respondents who practised in large law firms confirmed that their firms had a protocol or policy to promote ethical values and support the development of high professional standards.<sup>4</sup> The corresponding statistic was lower for respondents from small law firms.<sup>5</sup>

11. The second feature that emerges from the data pertains to the aspirations of our younger colleagues. They are strongly drawn to work and workplaces that are aligned with their values.<sup>6</sup> They value work that is not only intellectually stimulating but which also contributes to the mission of administering justice,<sup>7</sup> and they seek workplaces that are ethically run and respectful, and which adopt sustainable practices.<sup>8</sup> The profession’s culture must therefore cohere

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<sup>4</sup> Final Report, para 32 (the statistic is 35.26%).

<sup>5</sup> Final Report, para 32 (the statistic is 24.07%).

<sup>6</sup> Final Report, para 48 and Interim Report, para 21.

<sup>7</sup> Final Report, para 48, Figure 9 and Interim Report, para 26(a).

<sup>8</sup> Final Report, para 43, Figure 6 and Interim Report, para 26(e).

with the values and aspirations of this generation of lawyers in order to inspire and motivate them, and to avoid losing them.

12. A third feature that emerges from the data concerns the relational challenges within the profession, which further highlights the need to foster a strong community of practitioners committed to our core values. In the survey that I mentioned earlier, when asked to identify the key issues that negatively impacted workplace culture in the profession or affected their ability to practise successfully, respondents cited bullying and harassment, lack of respect, and lack of recognition including unfair discrimination as three of the top five challenges.<sup>9</sup> The Committee also observes that while the emergence of new ways of working has helped to make workplaces more family-friendly, this has implications on how the profession can continue to build and sustain the kinds of relationships and avenues of communication and support that it has traditionally relied on to nurture and train our younger lawyers.<sup>10</sup>

### ***B. Recommendations of the Committee***

13. The Committee's work and recommendations are important steps towards understanding and then addressing these diverse challenges. The Interim Report's 13 recommendations, which I accepted last year, have largely been implemented and finetuned where necessary. The Final Report augments this with eight new recommendations, which I have accepted for implementation in consultation with the profession and our stakeholders. These

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<sup>9</sup> Final Report, para 43 and Figure 5.

<sup>10</sup> Final Report, para 34.

recommendations are broadly divided into the three key areas of “ethos”, “learning” and the “profession”.

- (a) “Ethos” refers to the bedrock of values and habits that exemplify the practice of law by an honourable profession devoted to the pursuit of justice and that holds itself to the highest ethical standards.<sup>11</sup>
- (b) “Learning” refers to the need to entrench continuing education and training at every stage of one’s career.<sup>12</sup> It also encompasses mentoring, which complements the model of career-long education by giving lawyers access to positive models and advice during their careers.<sup>13</sup>
- (c) And finally, the Committee’s recommendations on the “profession” aim to tap into the wellspring of experience, expertise and resources that is available among fellow lawyers, law firms and the relevant professional institutions, in order to provide lawyers with effective support, and – when necessary – rehabilitation.<sup>14</sup>

14. Let me highlight some examples of the initiatives that address these three areas:

- (a) As you mentioned, Ms Sam, the Law Society will be launching a new peer support initiative, named the Legal Practitioners’ Support Protocol, to assist lawyers, with an emphasis on intervening *before* the risk factors escalate to the point of becoming grounds for formal complaints.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Final Report, paras 3(a), 57(a) and 59.

<sup>12</sup> Final Report, para 3(b) and 57(b).

<sup>13</sup> Final Report, para 92.

<sup>14</sup> Final Report, para 3(c).

<sup>15</sup> Final Report, paras 144 to 148.

- (b) To support practitioners in the sound management of their firms, the syllabus for the Law Society's Legal Practice Management Course will be enhanced to provide holistic training in this area.<sup>16</sup>
- (c) And to aid law firms in mentoring younger lawyers, the Law Society will develop a structured mentorship programme syllabus that law firms can adopt and tailor to their needs.<sup>17</sup> These resources should help lay the groundwork for the widespread implementation of mentorship schemes within the profession.
- (d) To encourage safe and sustainable workplaces, the Law Society will issue a Policy on the Prevention of Workplace Harassment and Bullying.<sup>18</sup> This is a point that you, Ms Sam, have emphasised and that I entirely agree with. I also look forward to the toolkit to guide law firms on basic structures and procedures that they can implement to prevent such conduct in the workplace.<sup>19</sup>
- (e) There will also be increased support for ethics training within law firms. The SAL will curate resources that law firms can use when conducting such training and make these available on the Ethics Repository on LawNet, which was launched last year.<sup>20</sup>
- (f) And to promote sustainable work practices and address the generation gaps in the workplace, the SAL will spearhead an initiative to further

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<sup>16</sup> Final Report, paras 154 to 163.

<sup>17</sup> Final Report, paras 164 to 165.

<sup>18</sup> Final Report, paras 171 to 175.

<sup>19</sup> Final Report, para 174.

<sup>20</sup> Final Report, paras 118 to 120.



examine these issues and develop a core set of aspirational principles and will work with a pilot group of law firms and legal departments.<sup>21</sup>

15. The SAL has also updated its 2011 publication, “A Civil Practice – Good Counsel for Learned Friends”. Complimentary copies of the new edition were placed on your seats. It incorporates updated practical guidance on professional courtesy and etiquette and is presented as a journal to encourage lawyers to document notes and reflections as they progress through their professional journeys.<sup>22</sup>
16. In addition, the SAL will hold the second Legal Profession Symposium this year, which I hope will afford us the opportunity for thinking deeply about the future of our profession, with particular attention to our younger colleagues. *They* are our future, and it is imperative that we hear their voices and understand their concerns and aspirations. I encourage all of you to attend the Symposium and support other aspects of the SAL’s work in this space.
17. This is just a snapshot of some of what is covered in, or arises out of, the Final Report. The many issues identified must be assessed in the context of other realities such as the availability of multiple career options for young lawyers, the growing demands involved in developing a successful legal career, and the diverse expectations of the different generational groups found in the typical modern workplace.<sup>23</sup> These are further complexities for a profession that finds itself in a state that is far from homogenous and that possesses

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<sup>21</sup> Final Report, paras 177 to 179.

<sup>22</sup> Final Report, para 87.

<sup>23</sup> Final Report, para 45.

divergent attitudes, beliefs and expectations. The challenge is multi-faceted, and we – as the profession’s current members and custodians – must confront it. To this end, the Judiciary will continue engaging with the Ministry of Law and other stakeholders, including the Law Society and the SAL, to chart the way forward.

18. I express my deepest appreciation to the entire Committee, led by its co-chairs, Justice Valerie Thean and Mr Jimmy Yim, Senior Counsel, for the immense effort that went into the completion of this work. Many of the Committee’s members have agreed to continue working on the implementation of the initiatives arising from the Final Report, and for this, I am most grateful.

#### **IV. OUR JUDICIARY IN THE WORLD**

19. I turn next to the Judiciary’s work. Mr Attorney, you spoke about your Chambers’ many significant contributions in the international arena; and Ms Sam, you touched on the Law Society’s efforts to build long-term relationships with other Bar associations. On the Judiciary’s part, we too have seen important developments on the international front. Indeed, it has been one of our busiest years in this respect. I have previously noted that the world is increasingly faced with challenges that affect all of humanity, such as climate change, truth decay, rising inequality and the continuing growth and rise of artificial intelligence. It is especially important that we collaborate and learn from one another in these fields.

20. We have therefore continued to grow our deep and substantive engagements with key jurisdictions including China, India, Indonesia and ASEAN, Australia, New Zealand, England and France, among others. These have taken various forms, including bilateral instruments and targeted Roundtables where we explore issues of mutual interest. On the multilateral plane, we actively led and contributed to platforms to promote international judicial cooperation and education. For example, the Singapore Judicial College co-organised, with the Supreme Court of Indonesia's Judicial Training Centre, a Masterclass for Commercial Judges. This was a model of international cooperation and it brought together about 70 Commercial Judges from 16 jurisdictions in the Asia-Pacific region for a week of learning together. We also organised the Judicial Roundtable on the Future of Justice which brought together a group of judges and academics for a week to discuss technology and the law, privacy and data, truth decay, and environmental law.
21. But perhaps the most groundbreaking development in the past year was the establishment of the International Committee of the SICC. In November, a Bill was passed for the creation of the International Committee to hear civil appeals and related proceedings from courts in prescribed foreign jurisdictions. The International Committee's members will include permanent members drawn from Judges of the Supreme Court and our International Judges, and ad hoc members drawn from the court of the foreign jurisdiction that is referring an appeal to the International Committee.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> MinLaw, Press Release, "Enhancing Singapore's Offerings as an International Dispute Resolution Hub with the Singapore International Commercial Court (International Committee) Bill" (14 October 2024): <<https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/enhancing-singapore-s-offerings-as-an-international-dispute-resolution-hub-with-the-sicc-ic-bill/>>.

22. The legislative framework allows for partnerships with other international counterparts, but the catalyst for this development was the signing of a bilateral treaty between the Governments of Singapore and the Kingdom of Bahrain last March to establish the Bahrain International Commercial Court (“BICC”), appeals from which may be heard by the International Committee.
23. The International Committee’s contribution to the BICC’s development is an integral feature of our wider collaboration with Bahrain, which is rooted in our shared commitment to advance the rule of transnational commercial law and to support commerce in an important region.<sup>25</sup> We will cooperate in various areas, including developing best practices to effectively adjudicate cross-border commercial disputes, judicial training, and devising the legal framework that will be most conducive to the BICC’s aim of providing a neutral and efficient forum for the resolution of international commercial disputes.<sup>26</sup> By working together, we hope to enhance the role that international commercial courts can play in upholding and strengthening the international rules-based order.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Speech by Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Transport, Mr Murali Pillai SC, Second Reading of the Singapore International Commercial Court (International Committee) Bill (12 November 2024), at para 34.

<sup>26</sup> Article 1 of Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Supreme Court of the Republic of Singapore and the Supreme Judicial Council of the Kingdom of Bahrain (8 May 2023).

<sup>27</sup> “Singapore’s new chapter in the story of transnational commercial justice” (The Business Times, 15 November 2024), Justice Philip Jeyaretnam.

## V. THE SICC'S FIRST DECADE

### A. *The SICC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary*

24. The establishment of the International Committee is an important landmark for the SICC. And it occurs on the cusp of a significant milestone for the SICC, namely, its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
25. Just ten years ago, immediately after the Opening of the Legal Year in 2015, we officially launched the SICC.<sup>28</sup> The SICC's growing caseload in the ensuing decade has resulted in the development of landmark jurisprudence in international commercial law, that has been described by commentators as "very influential" and emanating from a Court having a "truly international" character.<sup>29</sup> The SICC today is a well-respected commercial court known for its efficiency, procedural flexibility and fairness, and the use of innovative procedures compatible with and responsive to the realities of international commerce.<sup>30</sup>
26. To commemorate this anniversary, the SAL and the SICC have organised a public conference taking place over the next one and a half days. The theme of the Conference is "Transnational Commerce in a Shifting World", and it will cover a range of issues relevant to the transnational system of commercial

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<sup>28</sup> Sundaresh Menon CJ, Response at the Opening of the Legal Year 2015 (5 January 2015) ("OLY 2015 Response"), para 20: <[https://www.lsc.gov.sg/docs/default-source/oly-speeches/response-by-cj---opening-of-the-legal-year-2015-on-5-january-2015-\(final\).pdf](https://www.lsc.gov.sg/docs/default-source/oly-speeches/response-by-cj---opening-of-the-legal-year-2015-on-5-january-2015-(final).pdf)>.

<sup>29</sup> Professor Jan Paulsson, keynote speech at the London International Dispute Week 2024, "International Arbitration in the Year 2050 – Shipwrecked or Basking on the Shores of the Promised Land?" (3 June 2024): see Jack Ballantyne, Global Arbitration Review, "Paulsson warns of "over-lawyering"" (3 June 2024): <<https://globalarbitrationreview.com/article/paulsson-warns-of-over-lawyering>>; and Karan Abhaykumar Parmar, Kluwer Arbitration Blog, "LIDW 2024: International Arbitration Day – Keynote and Panel Discussion on the Role of Arbitration in Saudi Arabia's Giga Growth" (6 June 2024): <<https://arbitrationblog.kluwerarbitration.com/2024/06/06/lidw-2024-international-arbitration-day-keynote-and-panel-discussion-on-the-role-of-arbitration-in-saudi-arabias-giga-growth/>>.

<sup>30</sup> Order 1, rule 3 of the Singapore International Commercial Court Rules 2021.

justice in today's globalised world. Our Judges and International Judges will lead panel discussions, while the Minister for Home Affairs and for Law, Mr K Shanmugam, will join us for a fireside chat. We are especially privileged to have Senior Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong address us at the Conference dinner. I look forward to seeing many of you at what promises to be an excellent event.

***B. Tribute to the International Judges***

27. As we celebrate this important milestone, I would like to pay tribute to our International Judges, both past and present, for their generous service to Singapore.
28. When the SICC was launched, I announced the appointment of the first group of International Judges, comprising 11 eminent jurists from both the civil and common law traditions.<sup>31</sup> Today, 24 International Judges serve alongside our local Judges on the SICC's Bench, which is stronger and more diverse than ever before.
29. Our International Judges have played a critical role in the SICC's growth by affording us the benefit of their experience, expertise and standing. Their presence on the Court has been critical to earning the trust and confidence of our users. And their perspectives and contributions have helped to sharpen *our* own ideas on how to refine and improve the SICC's processes. Above all, our International Judges have been unstinting in their support for the *vision* of

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<sup>31</sup> OLY 2015 Response, para 22.

the SICC, and in their efforts to bring that vision to life. For this, we in Singapore are deeply grateful.

## **VI. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

30. Let me turn to our work within Singapore.

### **A. *Conversations with the Community***

31. Over the past year, we concluded our inaugural series of Conversations with the Community (“Conversations”). We organised these Conversations to promote public understanding of the Judiciary’s role and work. A Judge anchored each of the seven Conversations, and these allowed us to reach diverse constituencies, including students, lawyers, businesspeople, civil servants, representatives from our self-help community groups, civil society and members of the public. We are heartened by the results of this effort and will continue to seek avenues for further engagement with the broader community.

### **B. *Access to justice***

32. At the last of the Conversations, I spoke on the rule of law as we conceive of it for Singapore.<sup>32</sup> I observed that one of the most pressing challenges affecting the sustainability of the legal process today is access to justice. This is particularly significant given the changing profile of our users, a significant proportion of whom are self-represented persons.<sup>33</sup> We have therefore

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<sup>32</sup> Sundaresh Menon CJ, Speech at Conversations with the Community “Reimagining the Rule of Law – A Renewed Conception” (20 September 2024) at para 2: <<https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/news-and-resources/news/news-details/chief-justice-sundaresh-menon-speech-delivered-at-conversations-with-the-community-on-20-september-2024>>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* para 24.

worked hard to refine our processes to enable the public to access the dispute resolution pathways as easily as possible.<sup>34</sup>

33. Our Access to Justice Programme Office (“A2J Office”) and the Office of Transformation and Innovation (“OTI”) have been central to these efforts. The A2J Office has completed 14 projects since its establishment less than two years ago. To take just one example, the A2J Office launched the beta version of a digital guided questionnaire last February to help users navigate our website and the considerable volume of resources that can be found there. More than 2,000 users have accessed this tool, and the satisfaction ratings have been extremely high.

34. The Small Claims Tribunals, which mark their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, also play an important role in enhancing access to justice. The Tribunals were established to allow small claims between consumers and suppliers to be heard quickly and affordably. This was an important early innovation to enhance access to justice. The State Courts will be organising a series of events to commemorate the anniversary. Among other things, we hope to launch the product of the ongoing collaboration between the OTI and Harvey AI, on the development of an AI-enabled programme to further assist users of the Tribunals.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, para 26(c).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. at para 29.



## **VII. OTHER UPDATES**

35. The Judiciary has also been involved in other initiatives aimed at ensuring that both the profession and the courts are ready to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

### **A. *Enhancing the profession's future readiness***

36. I begin by highlighting some efforts to better equip our profession to meet the emerging demands of practice:

(a) First, the Reform of Legal Education Standing Committee, that Mr Attorney referred to, has worked with our law schools to refresh our law school curricula. Some notable developments include the enhancement of substantive civil law teaching to better equip our graduates for cross-border work; mandatory legal internships so students make better informed decisions about career pathways; and imparting practical skills in communication, technology, finance and data literacy.

(b) Second, the Working Group on the Reform of Legal Education has reviewed the requirements for Continuing Professional Development ("CPD") and recommended that they be harmonised, in a phased manner, to a 16-point requirement for all practising lawyers. This is a necessary, if modest, step given the importance of lifelong learning and upskilling in today's environment. The new requirements also give effect to the Ethics and Professional Standards Committee's recommendation

that ethics and professional standards should be a mandatory component of the CPD scheme for lawyers at every level of seniority.<sup>36</sup>

- (c) Third, the SAL is developing the Junior Lawyers Professional Certificate Programme, or “JLP”, which I mentioned at the Opening of the last Legal Year.<sup>37</sup> The JLP is designed to help young lawyers develop the practical skills necessary for modern legal practice, and will be launched in May. This is a promising initiative, and I encourage young lawyers to enrol in the JLP, and I ask the law firms to afford their junior colleagues the time and opportunity to fully participate in the programme.
  
- (d) Fourth, the SAL has been working with the Law Society and the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association to develop a national competency framework for the legal sector and an accompanying training roadmap. These are aimed at facilitating more targeted and structured professional development throughout the course of a lawyer’s career. These will initially be introduced for disputes and corporate lawyers, but similar frameworks and roadmaps for in-house counsel and allied legal professionals will also be rolled out over the next few years.
  
- (e) Fifth, beyond legal education, the SAL has developed a suite of measures to help lawyers in their efforts to deliver quality services more efficiently. A refreshed LawNet portal with new AI features now offers summaries of more than 15,000 unreported court judgments, together with catchwords. These were previously available only for reported

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<sup>36</sup> Interim Report, Recommendation 8.

<sup>37</sup> OLY 2024 Response, para 38(a).

judgments. The SAL will also continue to grow the collection of references for corporate law practice available in LawNet by releasing new Guides for Employment Agreements and Technology Transactions later this year. This will complement the existing SAL Clause Bank containing curated boilerplate clauses and the Mergers and Acquisitions Transaction Guide.

***B. Enhancements within the courts***

37. Within the Judiciary, we have worked on several initiatives to enhance our processes and the training of our Judges and judicial officers. Let me highlight just three of them:

- (a) First, we will introduce measures to enhance the management of cases involving sexual offences. These cases require careful handling because of the impact that the trial process can have on both complainants and accused persons. All cases involving sexual offences in the High Court, and trials involving selected sexual offences in the State Courts, will now be assigned to a Specialist List of experienced and specially trained Judges and District Judges. We will also pilot the use of enhanced pre-trial checklists to strengthen the management of these cases, and to protect complainants whilst preserving the right of accused persons to a fair trial.
- (b) The second is in family justice. Last October, the FJC celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This coincided with its move to its new home, “the Octagon”. And to operationalise therapeutic justice, or “TJ”, as its overarching

philosophy, the FJC has officially adopted a new “TJ Model” that fleshes out a framework for all participants in the family justice ecosystem to collaborate to better serve the needs of families and children. This will feature a triage process to channel matters to different tracks, through which cases will be managed according to their needs.<sup>38</sup> Key to the success of the new model will be the FJC’s continuing collaboration with counsellors, social workers, psychologists and other partners who share our vision of healing and hope. Family law practitioners play a vital role in the implementation of the TJ Model. To recognise the essential role of family law practitioners, and their vital contribution to TJ and other family law initiatives, a sub-committee led by Justice Teh Hwee Hwee will be formed to study the development of a customised and bespoke family law specialist accreditation framework in consultation with relevant stakeholders. I am deeply grateful to all who assume the mantle of the FJC’s work despite the emotional toll it can take.

- (c) The third relates to judicial education. The Singapore Judicial College has made much progress towards its objective of becoming a world-class institute for higher judicial education and research. The College has successfully implemented its comprehensive Judicial Competency Framework, which has significantly expanded the learning experiences available to Judges and judicial officers throughout their careers. This year, the College will launch its “International Fellow” and “Resident

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<sup>38</sup> SG Courts, “Family Justice Courts Therapeutic Justice Model (TJ Model)”: <<https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/who-we-are/therapeutic-justice>>.

Fellow” schemes. The “International Fellow” scheme engages the expertise of pre-eminent jurists to develop and enrich judicial education under the College’s auspices. The “Resident Fellow” scheme complements this by drawing upon the wealth of experience of our retired and senior judges. It is my pleasure to announce the appointment of Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella, former Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and presently visiting Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, as the inaugural International Fellow, and to welcome Justices Andrew Phang and Judith Prakash as our first Resident Fellows. These efforts to strengthen the College will support our Judges and judicial officers as “learning judges” equipped with and guided by a mindset of lifelong and self-directed learning.<sup>39</sup>

## VIII. BICENTENNIAL OF OUR COURTS AND JUSTICE SYSTEM

38. I come finally to an announcement that I alluded to at the beginning of my address. Next year will mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Charter of Justice. The Charter has been said to be, in many ways, “*the* foundational legal document” of our jurisdiction because it established the Court of Judicature of Penang, Singapore and Malaya, and enabled the reception of English law, thus dispelling the “legal chaos” that had allowed crime and disorder to take root in our early days.<sup>40</sup> The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter

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<sup>39</sup> Sundaresh Menon CJ, Keynote Address at the International Association for Court Administration Conference 2024 (12 November 2024) at para 13: <<https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/news-and-resources/news/news-details/chief-justice-sundaresh-menon--keynote-address-at-the-international-association-for-court-administration-conference-2024>>.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Phang Boon Leong, *From Foundation to Legacy: The Second Charter of Justice* (Singapore Academy of Law, 2006) (“*From Foundation to Legacy*”), p 2.

in 2026 is therefore also, in truth, the bicentennial of our courts and our legal system.

39. As this is a moment of great significance in Singapore's history, we plan to commemorate it with a major celebration. A range of events will be organised, and I mention just two of the key highlights today involving the Judiciary: work has commenced on a commemorative publication entitled "The Singapore Judiciary – A Bicentennial History", that is being edited by Justice Andrew Phang and Deputy Attorney-General Goh Yihan; and, to mark this key milestone, we plan to hold a formal sitting of the Court, two centuries on from its establishment.
  
40. Other events are planned, and more information will be provided in due course. I know the profession will join us in celebrating the bicentennial, and I encourage every member to actively participate in and contribute to the celebrations and give it your strongest support, so that we can make this a truly memorable landmark. For us in the legal community, the Second Charter of Justice is a very special document. It is part of *our* Singapore story. And I believe its legacy will continue to unfold in the years to come. Despite the challenges that we can expect to face, the Charter with its injunction to live and act "according to Justice and Right"<sup>41</sup> will continue serving as our north star. This has been the foundation of Singapore's success over the past 60 years, and there is every reason to believe it will continue to be the case in the coming years.

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<sup>41</sup> In the words of the Second Charter of Justice: see *From Foundation to Legacy*, p 8.

## **IX. APPOINTMENT OF SENIOR COUNSEL**

41. I come to the appointment of Senior Counsel this year. We have decided to appoint:

(a) Ms Hing Shan Shan Blossom; and

(b) Mr Christopher Ong Siu Jin.

42. It is a privilege to be admitted to the profession's most senior ranks. I congratulate the latest appointees and am confident that they will strive to set the standard for excellence as advocates and as leaders of our profession.

## **X. CONCLUSION**

43. Since independence, Singapore has had to continually adapt to the global environment to ensure our relevance in a world that owes nothing to small countries with no natural resources. Faced with this reality, we have focused on developing our people. Much of our country's success can be attributed to our ability to build workplaces with the type of culture and values that resonate with the brightest and most promising individuals. This has enabled us to establish industries, institutions and infrastructure that count among the best in the world today.

44. This is an immense source of hope and confidence for the future. And so, as we celebrate our nation's 60<sup>th</sup>, we in the legal profession must do all we can to ensure that the *next* 60 years and more will tell the story of new generations

of women and men with the character, ability and mettle to continue to serve Singapore and our legal system with distinction.

45. Thank you all and I wish you a very happy and fulfilling year ahead.

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