

**THE SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW  
GROUNDBREAKING EVENT**

**ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE ATTORNEY-GENERAL STEVEN CHONG**

**20 JANUARY 2014**

Mr Yong Pung How, Chancellor of Singapore Management University

Mr Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Singapore Management  
University

Professor Arnoud De Meyer, President of SMU

Professor Yeo Tiong Min, Dean of SMU School of Law

Distinguished guests

Staff, past and present students of SMU School of Law

The ground-breaking of the SMU School of Law building is a very historic occasion and I am extremely honoured to be here.

As I participate in this event, I am conscious that I follow in the footsteps of the Attorneys-General before me. At every stage of its brief history, SMU School of Law has enjoyed a close affiliation with the office of the Attorney-General. AG Chan Sek Keong chaired the Third Committee on the Supply of Lawyers. This committee recommended the establishment of a second law school in Singapore. Judge of Appeal Chao Hick Tin, as the then AG, was on the governmental panel that reviewed the report of the Steering Committee for the establishment of the School of Law. The current Chief Justice, Mr Sundaresh Menon, and the current dean of the Singapore Institute of Legal Education, Professor Walter Woon, my two

immediate predecessors, were founding members of the School of Law's Advisory Board.

## **The Past**

At this landmark occasion, it is appropriate, even as we contemplate the future, to gaze into the past. Many of you here today are current students of the law school. I am sure all of you will take pride in the knowledge that the leading lights of the Singapore legal fraternity were part of the inception of this law school. Retired Chief Justices Chan Sek Keong and Yong Pung How are "alumni" of the law school, having been conferred honorary doctorates by the school. 5 members of the current Supreme Court Bench and no less than three Presidents of the Law Society have served the Advisory Board or committees that were involved, in one capacity or another, in the establishment of the law school. This law school has truly been blessed with a rich pedigree from its birth.

## **The Present**

As we gather here today, there are plans for a third law school. It is tempting to forget that it was just six and a half years ago that the SMU School of Law recruited its first batch of law students. One can be forgiven for thinking that the Law School has been around for much longer than it has given the quality of graduates which it has produced. SMU's students have done exceptionally well. In my time as a Judge of the Supreme Court, I had worked and interacted with law clerks from the inaugural batch of SMU graduates. In my current office as Attorney-General, I have had the opportunity to engage with the graduates who have joined my Chambers. In that regard, I am very pleased to add that the first law Valedictorian of SMU cohort of graduates, Mr Russell Low and the first Valedictorian of the School of Law, Mr Joshua Lim, are both serving officers in my Chambers. I also have had the pleasure of reviewing the essays of the participants of the AGC – SMU Law Reform Essay Competition, an idea which was inspired by one of your students.

They consistently display depth, creativity and substance in suggesting constructive changes to existing legislation. The law school has also put SMU and Singapore on the world map through its international research work in several significant projects with the United Nations. In my experience, the SMU graduates that I have met and worked with have indeed exhibited the three core values of the law school – Integrity, Humanity and Scholarship.

## **The future**

I have discussed the past and the present. What about the future? I understand that the new law school building will feature three new and very significant facilities.

The first is a dedicated moot court. This will provide the SMU mooters with a facility in which they can further develop and hone their skills in oral advocacy. I use the word “further” because I have judged the SMU mooters in the Attorney General’s Cup and the National Round of the Jessup Moot Court Competition. Last year, I was part of the judging panel who selected the SMU team to represent Singapore in the Jessup Competition. I remarked that it was one of the finest teams I have had the privilege of judging for many years and it therefore came as no surprise to me that they made it all the way to the Grand Final only to lose narrowly to the team from India. This was a huge achievement as it was only SMU’s third try in the competition. SMU can take heart of the fact that NUS took many more years before appearing in the Grand Final. In spite of its brief history, SMU is fast developing an excellent reputation in mooting. I have told NUS that they cannot afford to rest on their past success. There is now serious domestic competition to earn the privilege to represent Singapore at the Jessup Competition. It is therefore entirely apt that this moot court will be named after the late Mr David Marshall, the finest criminal defence lawyer Singapore has ever produced.

The second new facility is the Kwa Geok Choo Library. It is a fitting name for the new law library; Mdm Kwa was known for her facility and eloquence with words.

Universities around the world are known for their libraries. I have seen the design of the new library and it is simply striking. The law library will provide the SMU law students with a comprehensive collection of legal literature and state of the art facilities in the setting of a conducive learning space.

The third new facility which the SMU School of Law will have is the unique SMU Pro Bono Centre. The legal community will now have a purpose-built location in the centre of town from which they may dispense pro bono legal advice. This is entirely in line with the culture forged by SMU in being the first law school to introduce mandatory pro bono work. This investment of time, effort and resources in the pro bono cause aptly reflects the ethos of public service that SMU exemplifies. This may well explain why many of SMU's top graduates, who can walk into any of the leading law firms, have instead chosen to join my Chambers.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of an institution having its own building cannot be understated. It was not too long ago that my Chambers moved into a building of its own – 1 UPS. In this short time, I have seen the rewards of having members of Chambers under one roof. There is a greater sense of belonging to and identity with the organisation.

Future generations of students of the SMU School of Law will have classes in this new building. Books will be read; friendships will be forged; eminent lawyers and leaders of the legal profession will be born. If, and when they look back on this day, they might wonder how the law school ever functioned without its own building.

But it did, and it was only through the sheer effort of the community of pioneers who took on the project of the SMU School of Law; the advisors, the faculty members, donors and students, many of whom are here, that we break new ground today.

More than the celebration of a new building, this event is indeed a celebration of your passion and commitment to succeed at the highest level.

So I congratulate SMU on this historic occasion. I look forward to returning to see the law school building in its finished glory.

Thank you.