

**SPEECH FOR GUEST-OF-HONOUR MS INDRANEE RAJAH SENIOR
MINISTER OF STATE FOR
MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND MINISTRY OF LAW**

**LAUNCH OF LAW AWARENESS WEEK @CDC 2017 AND
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) SIGNING CEREMONY
ON THURSDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2017 AT 8.00PM AT
SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF LAW FUNCTION HALL**

Mayors Ms Low Yen Ling, Dr Teo Ho Pin, Ms Denise Phua, Mr Desmond Choo

Grassroots Adviser Mr Lim Biow Chuan, PBM

President, Law Society of Singapore, Mr Gregory Vijayendran,

Deans and Professors from NUS, SMU and SUSS,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

1. I am delighted to be here today, to celebrate the strong partnership between the CDCs, LawSoc, and the universities to serve the community by increasing access to justice.

2. Working together, they have been providing basic legal information and advice through events such as the Law Awareness Week as well as initiatives in the form of Community Legal Clinics. This is extremely important. The best laws and courts will be of little effect if the man-in-the-street does not have access to them. Good legal information and advice helps to provide this access.

3. So I am very glad today to be able to witness the signing of two MOUs today that will strengthen this partnership, and enable LawSoc, the CDCs, and all their volunteers to better help their residents.

1st MOU: Renewal of MOU on Community Legal Pro Bono Services Network

4. Ten years ago, LawSoc, with support from the Ministry of Law, established the first Community Legal Clinics at the North West District and the South East District. These paved the way for legal clinics in all the other districts, which led to the CDCs and the Law Society signing an MOU in 2014 to create the Community Legal Pro Bono Services Network.

5. As a testimony of the success of this partnership, today, the CDCs and the Law Society are renewing this MOU, which will enable these legal clinics to continue their good work and help many more residents.

6. The Community Legal Clinics assist residents from low-income groups who find it difficult to afford a lawyer, by providing them with free basic legal advice. Since 2014, these clinics have helped more than 7,600 people. The network continues to expand every year, with 5 new clinics added this year. There are now a total of 23 legal clinics across the island, located at CDCs, CCs and RCs.

7. This has been made possible because more lawyers and student volunteers have come forward to serve. Today, 146 law firms and 2,052 lawyers volunteer at the Community Legal Clinics. This is 37% more lawyers compared to 2014. To those of you here today who have volunteered, I would like to say a special thank you.

8. Some of these legal clinics were started ground-up by volunteer lawyers who are also grassroots leaders. For example, Mr Steven Lam is a volunteer lawyer who has been running pro bono legal

clinics at Sengkang and North East District for 15 years. As a grassroots leader for more than 16 years, Steven saw that many residents didn't know where to turn for legal advice, or could not afford a lawyer. So he tapped on his legal expertise and network, and started to run pro bono legal clinics to serve his community. His dedication and hard work is inspiring.

9. The Law Society, in partnership with the CDCs, also organises Law Awareness Week, during which they run programmes to provide legal information to the community. These programmes include talks on common legal issues which you might encounter in your everyday life, such as dealing with cyberbullying or understanding your rights at the workplace. This Law Awareness Week there will be 53 talks, organised in convenient locations, such as the local CC or RC. This should help make legal information much more accessible for residents.

10. I would like to commend the CDCs and the Law Society for their hard work. I also applaud the pro bono efforts of every lawyer who has stepped forward to volunteer. Your efforts make a great difference to the lives of our residents. I encourage more lawyers to come forward and volunteer to help out with these meaningful initiatives.

2nd MOU: MOU between the CDCs and the Institutes of Higher Learning

11. The second MOU that will be signed tonight is between the CDCs and our law schools in NUS, SMU, as well as the new law school at the Singapore University of Social Sciences or 'SUSS'. This is a partnership for more law students to provide paralegal support at the Community Legal Clinics. Students will also help organise Law Awareness Week, which will enable both initiatives to reach even more residents.

12. Many law students are passionate volunteers. Pro bono work is a valuable opportunity to pick up the skills and knowledge beyond what you can learn within the classroom. It also reminds us of why we choose to practice law, and of our duty to serve the vulnerable. Such formative experiences stay with you, and shape the kind of lawyer and person you become.

13. For example, Ms June Lim, Managing Director of Eden Law, started getting involved in pro bono work as a student, and was the former President of the NUS Pro Bono Group. She continued to be actively involved in pro bono work after graduation and has over a decade of volunteer experience today, by helping out in the Community Legal Clinics,

Law Awareness Week, and also giving legal talks at CCs. June continues to get involved in pro bono work because she has been passionate about community law since a teenager and is committed to using her legal skills for the benefit of the community.

14. So I hope that students will be inspired by the pro bono lawyers whom they work with, and follow in June's footsteps to continue serving those who need help most, even after they graduate and join the legal fraternity.

Strong Community Spirit to Help the Less Privileged

15. What we are seeing here, is an emerging partnership model that taps on our strong community spirit to provide legal assistance and enhance access to justice, particularly for the less privileged.

16. For example, the student volunteers at NUS, under the guidance of Professor Lim Lei Theng, are piloting a new programme to help residents. The students, together with the volunteer lawyers, have held talks and consultation workshops in a few constituencies to raise awareness of the importance of having a Lasting Power of Attorney or the

'LPA'. I was heartened to learn that they educated 250 residents on the importance of making an LPA, and helped 31 residents draft their LPA documents. Given these encouraging results, the CDCs plan to partner NUS to expand this pilot programme to more districts.

Conclusion

17. In closing, I would like to thank the Mayors, their CDCs, the Law Society, the law firms, as well as the law faculties and students in the universities for your hard work and dedication to serve the community. Thank you for your generous spirit and your commitment to enable greater access to justice. You make a difference in the lives of the residents. I strongly urge our lawyers, grassroots leaders and law students here this evening to continue to pioneer initiatives and keep the pro bono spirit going strong.

18. Thank you very much.

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