

**SPEECH FOR GUEST-OF-HONOUR MR EDWIN TONG SC
MINISTER, MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY & YOUTH, AND
SECOND MINISTER, MINISTRY OF LAW
FOR LAUNCH OF LAW AWARENESS WEEKS @CDC 2020
ON MONDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Chairman Mayor Ms Low Yen Ling

Host Mayor Ms Denise Phua

Mayors Mr Desmond Choo
Mr Alex Yam, and
Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman

President of Law Society,
Mr Gregory Vijayendran SC

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

Introduction

1. Thank you for inviting me to launch the Law Awareness Weeks (LAWs) @CDC.
2. This is my third year launching LAWs, but the first time doing so online.
3. I am glad that the CDC continues to organise this event, because there is an even greater need during this pandemic.
4. We see more disputes, including:
 - a. Commercial disputes, as operations and supply chains are affected by border restrictions, circuit breaker, and safe distancing measures.
 - b. Online scams.
 - c. Family violence, especially during the circuit breaker period.
5. Now is a time, more than ever, that we – the community, the legal profession and partners need to come together to continue to promote legal awareness and to provide legal advice to those that need it.
6. I am heartened that many of our partners, stakeholders and volunteers have stepped up and stepped forward.
 - a. They not only continued their services online during this critical period, but also

b. Put in place additional processes, to ensure that nobody will fall through the cracks simply because they do not have access to digital devices or internet connection.

7. For example:

a. The Legal Aid Bureau collaborated with the Social Service Offices and Family Service Centres to provide civil legal aid via videoconferencing.

b. The Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS) Office moved the CLAS application process online, and went the extra mile to provide applicants with step-by-step guidance for the online applications.

c. Volunteer lawyers continued to provide legal advice through Law Society Pro Bono Services' Community Legal Clinics, which continued to operate virtually.

8. All of you have displayed true professionalism.

a. I quote a paragraph from an address that Justice Eleanor Cronk of the Ontario Court of Appeal gave in 2005 on Professionalism and Barriers to Justice:

b. "The elements of professionalism include not only integrity, honour, independence, civility and leadership. Central to professionalism is the duty of service to the public, not to some of the public; not to only the dominant majority; but, to all the public, including

the disadvantaged, the unpopular and the marginalized. Any contemporary definition of professionalism can import no less.”

Memorandums of Understanding

9. We will see more of that professionalism with the renewal of two Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs).

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

10. The first is the renewal of the MOU between the Law Society Pro Bono Services and the CDCs.

11. In 2007, the Law Society, with support from MinLaw, established the first Community Legal Clinics (CLCs) at the North West District and the South East District.

12. These paved the way of 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.

13. The MOU was renewed in 2017.

14. As an affirmation to the success of this partnership, the CDCs and the Law Society are renewing this MOU for the second time.

15. Today, we have 16 legal clinics under the MOU network across Singapore, located at CDCs, CCs and RCs, and they have helped almost 7,000 people since the MOU was last renewed.

16. This is made possible because more lawyers and student volunteers have come forward to serve.

a. Today, there are more than 190 law firms and nearly 2,400 lawyers registered to volunteer at the legal clinics.

b. This more than two times the number of law firms, and more than four times the number of lawyers registered since the MOU was first signed in 2014.

17. I would like to commend the CDCs, LawSoc and every lawyer for your hard work.

a. Your pro bono efforts make a difference to the lives of our residents.

18. Take for example this case undertaken by Mr Wayne Tan who has been volunteering with the CLCs since 2013.

a. Wayne recounted that there was a young man who had inherited the family flat after his parents passed away without leaving a will.

b. However, he was pressured to transfer the flat to another family member, who threatened to have him evicted.

c. He then sought advice at the legal clinic and met Wayne, who gave advice on the issue and reassured him of his rights to the flat.

19. This may seem like a simple problem to some of us, but it was a huge problem for the young man.

a. The young man came into the session troubled and clueless as to how to resolve the issue, but left the session empowered with some legal knowledge and a potential course of action.

b. This makes a huge difference to him.

2nd MOU – Renewal of MOU between the CDCs and the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs)

20. The second MOU that will be renewed is between the CDCs, LSPBS and our law schools in NUS, SMU, and SUSS. Under this MOU, LSPBS helps to organise various pro-bono legal awareness programmes and events with volunteer law students and lawyers.

21. This year, the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association (SCCA) has joined as a new partner in this MOU.

a. The Vice-President of SCCA Mr Wan Kwong Weng, who is SCCA's signatory for the MOU, happens to be also the Central Singapore CDC's District Councillor, so I am sure he played a big part in encouraging SCCA to join the MOU.

b. Kwong Meng is deeply involved in community service, and was conferred the Public Service Medal in 2012 for his contributions to the community.

c. I believe that the SCCA will be a valuable addition to the existing partnerships, given their large pool of corporate counsel, strong ties with the legal community and contributions to the society.

22. I am pleased that the CDCs, IHLs, and LSPBS are continually expanding networks and forming partnerships to better serve the community.

23. To all the students, I would say this:

a. Pro bono is a valuable opportunity to sharpen your lawyering skills, reminds us of why we choose to practice law, and of our duty to serve.

b. If we choose to be bystanders, we will be denying people to access to justice, and that's injustice.

c. So I urge all of you to continue contributing, even after you graduate, and help the most vulnerable in our society.

New Pilot: Youth Community & Legal Clinic

24. I am also pleased to announce that the CDCs have initiated a pilot online project called the Youth Community & Legal Clinic with LSPBS and the three IHLs.

25. The Professors from the three IHLs who oversee the pro bono segments in the three Law Schools -

a. A/P Eleanor Wong from NUS;

b. Professor Chan Wing Cheong from SMU; and

c. Mr Ranald Or and Mr Tris Xavier from SUSS -

are supportive of this youth project, and have worked closely with the CDCs and the CEO of LSPBS, Mr Lim Tanguy on this project.

26. This pilot project will provide a platform for them to seek legal information and advice if they encounter legal problems, such as when they are involved in or witnessed a serious crime, and are unaware of their legal rights.

27. It will also enable youths to receive social-emotional and financial help targeted at their needs through referrals with the CDCs.

28. With the support of the IHLs, we now have a pool of young lawyers and law students actively engaged in assisting these youths. Being of the same generation, they are more attuned to the needs of the youths.

Conclusion

29. Let us continue to join hands in helping the community, which is more important now more than ever.

30. I strongly encourage all our partners, stakeholders, and volunteers here to continue to pioneer initiatives and seize the new opportunities that are ahead of us.

31. I hope that you will be able to pass the volunteerism spirit you have shown on to the generations that come after you.

32. Thank you.