

**Speech by Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health and Ministry
of Law, Mdm Rahayu Mahzam, at the 3rd Annual France-Singapore
Symposium on Law and Business
11 May 2023 (Thu)**

The Honourable the Chief Justice of Singapore Sundaresh Menon

**Mr Stéphane Braconnier,
President of Assas University**

Ms Julie Couturier, President of Paris Bar Association

Fellow speakers
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

1. A very good morning to all of you.
2. It is a pleasure to be here, on my first official visit to France as an office-holder in the Ministry of Law.
3. Thank you for inviting me, to be a part of the opening of this year's edition of the France-Singapore Symposium on Law and Business.
4. This Symposium, which is already in its third edition, is a meaningful platform that facilitates exchange between legal leaders in Europe and Asia on law and business. Indeed, I am truly humbled to be here in this august building, in this temple of knowledge, as Mr Braconnier suggested earlier. I am also deeply humbled to share with you some perspectives after listening to the very insightful sharing from the earlier speakers.
5. As the focus of this year's Symposium is on technology, data protection and Artificial Intelligence, I thought I would share the following:
 - (a) Firstly, the evolution of technology in Singapore's legal sector;
 - (b) Secondly, recent initiatives by the Ministry and our industry partners in response to technological developments; as well as
 - (c) Thirdly, my views on the impact of technology on the work of lawyers.

Evolution of Technology in Singapore's Legal Sector

6. I was called to the Bar in 2004 and spent some time in practice, doing commercial litigation and family law.

- (a) I subsequently left practice and served as Deputy Registrar in the Syariah Court before returning to practice in 2015, when I joined politics.
- 7. So I have seen for myself the evolution of technology in the legal sector in Singapore.
- 8. Over the years, law firms have adopted various legaltech solutions to make their work processes more efficient.
 - (a) They range from more basic solutions such as practice management systems to streamline daily work processes to more advanced solutions like eDiscovery software that assists with document review.
- 9. As for the judiciary, the adoption of technology can be traced back to even before I began practice.
 - (a) The Electronic Filing System (EFS) was first introduced in 1997 on a pilot basis to allow lawyers to experience the advantages of filing documents electronically, to gather their feedback.
 - (b) The EFS was later upgraded to the eLitigation system in 2013 to allow law firms a single access point throughout the litigation process to manage their case files.
- 10. While the legal profession in Singapore continued to take its careful steps in the adoption of technology, the unprecedented onset of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the pace at which law firms and users across the sector embraced technology-based practices.
 - (a) Practices which were previously unthinkable in the past are now widely acceptable.
 - (i) Virtual client meetings provide lawyers and clients with the ease of dialling in from their own homes or from anywhere in the world.
 - (ii) The judiciary implemented virtual hearings to ensure access to justice even at the height of the pandemic when safe-distancing restrictions were in place.
- 11. As we emerge from the pandemic, it is now up to us to not forget the strong moves towards digital transformation that were made during the pandemic and continue to take strides in embracing technology.

Recent Initiatives by the Ministry of Law

- 12. The Ministry is committed to support our law firms in this journey.

13. We work with relevant agencies to support the industry in the adoption of technology, so that law firms can continue to keep up with competitive pressures.
14. This started as early as 2017 when the Ministry, the Law Society of Singapore and what was then known as SPRING Singapore launched the 'Tech Start for Law' programme to help Singapore law firms embrace and leverage technology to deliver better services.
15. The 'Tech-celerate for Law' programme was later launched in 2019 by the Ministry, the Law Society of Singapore, Enterprise Singapore and the Infocomm Media Development Authority.
 - (a) The scheme was a step up from the 'Tech Start for Law' programme and covered both baseline and advanced technology solutions.
16. As our society and economy evolve, it may become even harder for smaller companies to keep up with all the rapid changes.
 - (a) The same can be said for the many, many small law firms within Singapore's legal industry.
17. Given the lack of economies of scale, many small and medium-sized Singapore law practices did not have the luxury of time or resources to customise technology solutions to make the move to "go digital".
18. Recognising this, the Ministry stepped in to develop the Legal Technology Platform (LTP), which was launched in July 2022. This was shared earlier by the Chief Justice.
19. The LTP is a matter management and collaboration tool designed around legal workflows, integrated with legaltech tools and public services already commonly used by law firms.
20. To date, around 30 Singapore-based firms have adopted the LTP and early adopters have provided good reviews of the platform.
 - (a) For example, Albakri LLC, a small Singapore law practice, has managed to use the LTP to create its own matter templates and list tasks relevant to a particular matter.
 - (b) This frees up time for the training of the firm's younger associates and improves the firm's knowledge management practices.
21. We continue to keep our pulse on the ground. If there is a need to provide additional support to law firms in their move towards greater adoption of technology-based practices, we will do so.
22. Besides law firms, we also encourage our dispute resolution institutions to adopt technology to transform themselves and their offerings, to keep pace with global developments.

- (a) Maxwell Chambers, the world's first integrated dispute resolution complex, pivoted quickly from a pure physical hearing centre to provide users with the options of virtual and hybrid hearing facilities, during the pandemic.
 - (b) Our dispute resolution institutions – the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) and the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC) – also offer parties the options of virtual or hybrid hearings.
23. Of course, the journey towards digital transformation is a continuous one and not one that the Government can simply undertake on its own, without the work of our key partners.
- (a) The Singapore Academy of Law (SAL) drives programmes promoting and advancing the use of technology, such as the TechLaw.Fest, and this Symposium.
 - (b) Our local law schools too, are doing their part and have introduced technology-related classes within their curriculum.
24. The synergy of the efforts of all the players within the ecosystem help to collectively enhance our legal services and position Singapore as the leading legal services and dispute resolution hub it is today.

Impact of Technology on Lawyers' Work

25. There have been concerns about how technology will impact lawyers.
- (a) Suffolk University's Law School Dean, Andrew Perlman famously made headlines for co-authoring an academic paper with ChatGPT.
 - (b) Legal scholars at the University of Minnesota Law School also put ChatGPT to the test. It ended up with a low but passing grade of C+ in the four courses it took.
26. As technology becomes more sophisticated, I think it is normal for people to ask – will the lawyer end up being replaced by technology?
27. While technology can indeed automate some of the more labour-intensive parts of a lawyer's work, I think that technology will not replace lawyers just yet.
28. I think it would be naïve if I don't take heed of the caution that has been put forth about the implications and significant impact of technology, AI, on the lawyer's role.
29. But I believe that technological advancements will in fact, aid the modern lawyer and help them move up the value chain.

30. Ultimately, the law is still very much, a human profession.
- (a) Clients see lawyers as their problem solvers.
 - (b) When faced with a dispute or issue, they rely on their lawyers to come up with efficient and effective ways to resolve their problems.
 - (c) Problems are often unique, each with its own set of issues, context, background, and personalities involved.
 - (d) And this is something that faceless technology may not be able to provide, even when trained with years of case law. We have heard earlier, about the significance of values and principles that lawyers bring to the ecosystem, which technology and AI do not possess.

I am quite hopeful. I am a person who is often looking at the glass half full. I think the fact that we are here today, combining forces to try and learn, the fact that there is a new generation of lawyers who are coming into the space, mostly digital natives, who are savvy, and hopefully with the right attitude to grasp this evolution and change the ecosystem.

31. So I believe that the modern lawyer is one who can build on their expertise to provide customised advice to solve their clients' problems.
32. The future holds with it many opportunities for growth and change, and as also alluded to earlier, it is not an effort of just one person, one entity; it is a collective effort. Governments have to come and look at policies, nudge and adjust accordingly. Academics, institutions, lawyers, professionals would have to step up; the international community would have to step up..
- (a) As we train our future entrants into the legal profession, we will need to equip them to deal with these rapid advancements.
 - (b) Beyond being skilled in the use of technology itself, the future lawyer is one who is agile and can adapt to the rapid advancements in the operating environment they work in.
 - (c) Those already in the profession will also need to be open to new opportunities to harness the power of technology while tapping on their wealth of experience.
33. This is very much something Singapore has to keep doing. It is in Singapore's DNA to keep improving.
- (a) As you may be aware, Singapore is a small-city state with no natural resources.
 - (b) We cannot afford to and will not stand still. We have to continue learning and build on our existing efforts.

- (c) As we continue to level up our offerings to better meet the needs of businesses transacting in, from and through Singapore, we will find ways to bring everyone along, so that no one is left behind.

Conclusion

- 34. With all that said, technology in law and law in technology are still considered relatively nascent fields.
- 35. There is a lot of space for cross-sharing and cross-learning in these fields.
- 36. This Symposium provides a good opportunity to do so.
- 37. I do look forward to hearing from leading experts from both countries and the insights into data protection, technology and artificial intelligence that they will be sharing during the Symposium.
- 38. At this juncture, let me make a public service announcement on behalf of the Ministry of Law, I would also like to invite all of you to Singapore, to attend the Singapore Convention Week (SC Week) 2023, from 28 August to 1 September.
 - (a) SC Week is organised by the Ministry, in collaboration with our partner organisations, including the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).
 - (b) It features a week-long series of legal and dispute-resolution events where thought leaders from around the world are brought together, to share insights and best practices amidst a changing operating landscape.
 - (c) There will be many opportunities, not just for cross-sharing and cross-learning, but also for networking.
 - (d) So I do look forward to welcoming you to Singapore and seeing you in Singapore.
- 39. Thank you, and I wish you all a fruitful time at the Symposium.