

# **LAWNET 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DINNER**

Friday, 16 October 2015

S.E.A. Aquarium, Resorts World Sentosa

## **OPENING SPEECH BY JUSTICE CHAN SENG ONN CHAIRMAN LAWNET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon,

Fellow Colleagues on the Bench,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

### **Introduction**

1. A very good evening to all of you and welcome to the LawNet Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration. It is heartening to see so many members of the legal community and LawNet supporters here tonight to mark the quarter century milestone of the LawNet service. Your contributions and strong support are the very reasons for the success and relevance of LawNet from its inception to its strength today.

### **LawNet Transformation through the Years**

2. As we celebrate the twenty-fifth year of LawNet, it is only befitting to retrace some of its history. The LawNet as we know today had its humble beginnings in the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) during the late '80s. Back then, the AGC created an electronic version of the Singapore Statutes for ease of update and reference within AGC. Soon, it became obvious that the same service could be provided to the

public at large with little investment through a dial-up network. Bear in mind that those were pre-internet days where the access speed was in terms of kilobytes per second, and we were storing data on floppy disks.

3. In 1990, a partnership with Singapore Network Services (SNS), the predecessor of the current CrimsonLogic, was forged for the online delivery of the LawNet service. In fact the “Net” in LawNet, signifying the delivery of law over a network, was referring to SNS at that time. Looking back, it is thrilling to see that the spirit and intent of LawNet have withstood the test of time and they remain still very relevant today. Another major development came in 1995 when LawNet was transferred from AGC to SAL. By then, LawNet had evolved to include Subsidiary Legislation and was poised to launch Intereq (Integrated Requisition System) for conveyancing. The Intereq project was an ambitious effort to pull together all the required information from various government agencies to conduct due diligence in property transactions. Intereq was commissioned in 1996.

4. By late ‘90s, the Internet was maturing and growing rapidly. In keeping up with technology advancement, LawNet was migrated from dial-up access to Internet access in 1998. The Internet brought about many advances in service delivery such as high bandwidth and rich content. The Internet also changed the charging model of LawNet. In the dial-up era, the charging was by access time (at 50 cents per minutes) and by data transfer (at 10 cents per block of 512 bytes). You can imagine the stress level of the users in those days, having to perform meaningful research and yet be under constant pressure to

limit the access time to contain cost. The users were really paying for technology rather than content. With the advent of the Internet, the concern of users hogging computing resources like the dial-up lines became irrelevant and per user charging model was introduced. The charging paradigm remains to this day, keeping the service affordable to users and also ensuring that LawNet is self-sustaining financially. The ability to access information economically “anytime, anywhere” is fundamental in the information age. In this aspect, LawNet has effectively elevated the legal community to operate in the knowledge economy.

### **The New LawNet 3**

5. Like all systems, LawNet went through both major and minor changes to keep itself up-to-date and relevant to the legal community. The first major revamp was completed in 2007 with the launch of the LawNet 2 portal. LawNet 2 harnessed modern web portal technology to provide the user with an integrated interface that enhanced the legal research experience. In 2011, the LawNet iPad App was introduced to satisfy the mobility needs of the legal profession.

6. LawNet 3 is the latest iteration which was launched recently on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015. The information and databases are better organised in LawNet 3. For example, modules are classified by practice areas instead of services. Legal research content categories are given more intuitive names and documents are regrouped into the appropriate categories. User friendly features like password reset and perpetual IDs were introduced. The user ID is now permanently tied to a person

and is portable across organisations as the practitioner progresses in his career. Research tools are now available on every web page instead of just on the Legal Research page. Users can also now highlight and annotate on the documents in LawNet as he performs his research. The highlights and annotations can be edited, printed and are portable with the user ID.

### **LawNet Content**

7. Apart from the technology, LawNet recognises the importance of delivering timely and relevant content to its subscribers. Over the years, many new content databases were acquired to enrich their legal research work. LawNet now contains the entire written laws of Singapore together with the judgments of the Courts. It also contains resources from other countries such as English Case Law, Malaysia Case Law, Indian Case Law, and databases from AustLII and HKLII. Last month (in September 2015), we launched a new Premium Content section comprising Academy Publishing titles, the Sentencing Information & Research Repository from the State Courts, and the JustCite citator tool. New Premium Content such as Supreme Court Pleadings and Assessment of Damages, Syariah Appeals Reports and the Singapore Press Holdings Newlink Service are being prepared for progressive release on LawNet 3. Many thanks to Ms Juthika Ramanathan from Supreme Court, Mr Tan Ken Hwee and Mr Yeong Zee Kin from AGC and Mr Lim Seng Siew for providing the leadership and guidance that were invaluable during the development.

## **Conclusion**

8. It has been a long and rewarding twenty-five year journey and I am privileged to be part of it. Today, LawNet has achieved near 100% penetration in the legal sector. Therefore, to the legal community and all of you present tonight, I would like to say a big thank you for your contributions and unwavering support. In particular, I would like to thank the Honourable Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon for his insight, leadership and strong support that made my chairmanship of LawNet so much easier. I take this opportunity also to acknowledge the significant contributions of my fellow partner Justice Lee Seiu Kin, who is the driving force behind many of the LawNet initiatives. Special thanks must go to the very important troops that made it all happen; from SAL, Serene Wee, Balasakher Shunmugam, Sriram Chakravarthi, Deanna Kwok, Tan Xiao Wen, Judy Ang, Norhayati, Debrina Choo and especially past director Tay Bee Lian, who led the LawNet 3 project team. I would also like to thank our partners CrimsonLogic and NCS for working very hard alongside SAL to transform our wishes into reality. Last but not least, the present and past LawNet Committee Members, especially Lim Seng Siew, Yeong Zee Kin, Tan Ken Hwee and Juthika Ramanathan, for providing valuable insights, suggestions, feedback and critique to keep LawNet relevant to the legal community.

9. Before I end Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to wish all of you a pleasant and enjoyable evening ahead. It is now my pleasure to invite our Guest of Honour, the Honourable Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon to deliver his keynote address.