

# MASS ADMISSION DINNER 2025

## Opening Address

Tuesday, 6 May 2025

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon  
Supreme Court of Singapore

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My fellow Judges,

Members of the Academy,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

### I. Introduction

1. Good evening and a very warm welcome to our inaugural Mass Admission Dinner (or “**Dinner**”). I want to begin by thanking the team from the Singapore Academy of Law (or “**SAL**”) for the tremendous effort that they have put into organising this event, and I do want to also extend my heartiest congratulations to each of you on your admission as a Lawyer (Non-Practitioner). I am very happy to speak to you this evening at this historic and extraordinarily nice venue. It is a venue that holds special significance to us in the legal community, because this was once the terrace of the former Supreme Court building, and the Rotunda dome that you see used to house the Supreme Court library for more than half a century.

2. This historical note should remind us that we belong to a profession with a rich history and heritage, and in Singapore that spans nearly two centuries, a milestone that we will celebrate next year.<sup>1</sup> It is my hope that tonight's Dinner will mark the beginning of a new tradition, where every cohort of newly admitted lawyers will come together to celebrate and to reflect on this significant milestone in their legal careers. Through such occasions, we hope to strengthen the bonds within the legal fraternity, and it is this idea of *community* that I wish to develop in my remarks this evening.

## II. A New Tradition – the Mass Admission Dinner

3. Let me first outline the background to how this Dinner came to be, and it can be traced to the recommendations of the Ethics and Professional Standards Committee (or the "**Committee**"), which I established two years ago. The Committee was led by its co-chairs, Justice Valerie Thean and Mr Jimmy Yim SC, who are both here this evening together with many other members of the Committee. It was established to develop a strategy to reaffirm the moral centre and values of our profession, and to help lawyers and those who aspire to a legal career understand that it is a calling to be answered with honesty, integrity and dedication.<sup>2</sup> One of the Committee's many recommendations was to cultivate

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<sup>1</sup> See Sundaresh Menon CJ, "Response Delivered at the Opening of the Legal Year 2025" (13 January 2025) at paras 38–40 on the bicentennial of our courts and legal system in 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Ethics and Professional Standards Committee, "Final Report" (8 January 2025) ("**EPSC Final Report**") at para 17.

“collegiality and common aspiration” through “community rituals”, and this was seen as part of a broader effort to entrench and transmit our core values.<sup>3</sup>

4. Arising from this recommendation, the SAL took up the challenge and decided to introduce two new initiatives to mark pivotal moments in a lawyer’s professional journey – the first of those is this Mass Admission Dinner while the second is a Valedictory Dinner that will be held each year to mark the point when a cohort reaches the statutory retirement age. The SAL will share more details about the latter initiative in due course.

### **III. The Importance of Community in the Legal Profession**

5. With that background in mind, I turn to the central theme of my remarks this evening, which is the importance of community in the legal profession. This is a necessary step in our effort to *maintain the dignity and standing of the profession*, by reminding us that we are fellow members of an honourable profession united by a common purpose and calling, which encompasses bringing justice to our fellow citizens, safeguarding and upholding the rule of law, and serving the public good.

6. We think this is important because aside from providing a unity of purpose, a strong sense of community – both within the workplace and in the wider profession – is and has always been an integral aspect of *ensuring a successful and sustainable career in the law*. The practice of law demands hard work,

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<sup>3</sup> See Recommendation 2 of the EPSC Final Report at paras 64–74.

dedication and resilience over the long haul,<sup>4</sup> and this calls for a sense of craftsmanship in the approach one brings to one's work, by which I mean the need to take pride in your craft, to adopt a long-term horizon in your journey through the law, and to derive purpose and meaning from the very process of practising your craft. I will say more on this at the Opening Conference of the Junior Lawyers Professional Certification Programme in two weeks' time, and I hope to see many of you there.

7. The demanding nature of our craft means that you will inevitably have to draw upon the wider community for guidance and support. Events like this are designed to help you in your search for trusted mentors and senior colleagues who can do just that by leading the way, and at the same time also connect you with peers who will stand with you when the going gets tough. Beyond your core support group, maintaining collegial ties with other lawyers throughout the profession can also make your experience in the law so much more pleasant and enjoyable, which too is tied to the aim of ensuring the sustainability of our professional endeavours. We must guard against an uncompromising “me against the rest” mentality towards other lawyers, because that can lead to disillusionment with the practice of law. While we as lawyers owe a duty of unwavering loyalty to our clients,<sup>5</sup> this commitment need not and must not come

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<sup>4</sup> Sundaresh Menon CJ, “The Legal Profession – A Community of Learned Friends”, speech delivered at Mass Call 2024 (19 August 2024) at paras 4–6.

<sup>5</sup> *Law Society of Singapore v Ahmad Khalis bin Badul Ghani* [2006] 4 SLR 308 at [62].

at the expense of the mutual courtesy and respect that we should show to one another.

8. To be clear, the sustainability of legal practice is a complex challenge that will require a more comprehensive set of solutions if we are to address it effectively. This is an issue that I have spoken about on a few recent occasions,<sup>6</sup> and I have suggested that there is a need for the profession as a whole to look into this issue and to address it urgently. We will have the occasion to do just that at the second Legal Profession Symposium in July, along with the focus groups and workshops leading up to that event. To the same end, the SAL has produced a five-part video series to explore vital themes such as the evolving aspirations of young lawyers and the generational dynamics that are present within our workplaces. The first of these videos will be shown this evening.

9. Finally, our wider community of lawyers will help you in your training, formation and development as lawyers. So much of the learning that takes place in our profession, which allows us to maintain high standards, comes from the collective sharing of knowledge, experiences and wisdom, and by imparting values and best practices from one generation to the next. I therefore hope that you will find this and the other initiatives that we are working on to be helpful in enhancing your professional journeys.

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<sup>6</sup> Sundaresh Menon CJ, “Reimagining the Rule of Law: A Renewed Conception”, speech delivered at the Conversations with the Community (20 September 2024) at paras 30–34; Sundaresh Menon CJ, “Maintaining the Effective Functioning of the Judiciary: An Accessible and Values-Based Justice System”, speech delivered at the Plenary Judicial Session of the 37th LAWASIA Conference (13 October 2024) at paras 14–20.

#### **IV. Concluding Remarks**

10. To be sure, the objective of developing a truly collegial community will require constant attention and effort, and it is an endeavour that has become more challenging in recent times. This is so on account of at least two main developments.

11. The first is the sense that the practice of law is becoming more commercialised, and at the same time the volume, pace and complexity of work has been increasing steadily. In such an environment, it can be difficult to find the time and space to build meaningful relationships with our fellow professionals. And this is compounded by a peculiar feature of our profession, which is that it is inherently competitive – the very nature of our work frequently places us on opposing sides, whether in the courtroom or across the negotiating table.

12. And the second is the considerable growth of the profession in the sixty years since our nation's independence. We had just 235 practising lawyers in 1965,<sup>7</sup> and when you compare this with last year's figure of 6,348 practising lawyers and nearly 4,800 in-house counsel,<sup>8</sup> it becomes obvious that it has become more challenging and demanding to sustain collegiality and cohesiveness.

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<sup>7</sup> Attorney-General VK Rajah SC, speech at the Opening of the Legal Year 2015 at para 24.

<sup>8</sup> Sundaresh Menon CJ, "The Centrality of Trust in the Legal Profession", speech delivered at the Mass Admission Ceremony 2025 (21 April 2025) at para 22.

13. Taken together, these developments suggest that now more than ever, there is a pressing need for us to be much more deliberate and intentional in fostering a sense of community within our profession. This Dinner is one step in that direction, and I am confident that our key stakeholders – particularly the Law Society and the SAL – will continue developing other initiatives that will strengthen the ties and bonds between us.

14. So I wish you a truly enjoyable and memorable evening, and I extend my very best wishes for a hugely successful and fulfilling career ahead. Thank you very much.