

RESPONSE BY CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON
OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2021

Monday, 11 January 2021

Mr Attorney,

Mr Vijayendran,

Honoured Guests,

Members of the Bar,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On behalf of the Judiciary, I am delighted to welcome you to the Opening of this Legal Year. I am very grateful to all of you, including those from abroad, for taking the time to join us for today's proceedings by way of video-conference.

2. The Opening of this Legal Year is historic in two senses at least. First, this marks the first time the Opening of the Legal Year is being hosted in the premises of the State Courts. Second, these proceedings, in common with many court hearings this past year, are being conducted using an internet-based remote conferencing platform. As routine as this might seem today, it would have been simply inconceivable just a year ago. This is a sign of the

far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on nearly every aspect of our personal and professional lives.

3. Over the past year, we have all had to adapt rapidly in order to contend with the challenges foisted upon us by the pandemic. Amidst our collective efforts to cope with this, we were also confronted with a case that both of you, Mr Attorney and Mr Vijayendran, have spoken of, that seemed to challenge the foundations of our criminal justice system. As we look back on all this, I think it can safely be said that all of us have had a challenging year and the outlook is likely to remain somewhat difficult for the immediate future. But it is precisely in such times that we should re-examine our long-held assumptions, renew our search for better and more robust ways to carry out the vital work of administering justice and re-imagine our future. And so, this morning, I intend, principally, to share some reflections from the perspective of the Judiciary on some of the issues that we have had to contend with this past year.

II. FELICITATIONS

4. Let me begin though with the customary recap of the changes to the Bench since the Opening of the last Legal Year.
5. First, we welcomed to the Bench Judicial Commissioner Andre Maniam in May 2020, and Judicial Commissioners Philip Antony Jeyaretnam and Kwek Mean Luck just a week ago. They bring with them a wealth of experience covering a broad range of areas. In addition, Justice Dedar Singh Gill was

appointed a Judge of the High Court in August 2020, and in March this year, Judicial Commissioner Mavis Chionh will be similarly appointed.

6. Second, the legislative reforms to the appellate structure in the Supreme Court, primarily involving the establishment of the Appellate Division of the High Court, entered into force on 2 January 2021. With this, Justice Andrew Phang was re-appointed as Vice-President of the Court of Appeal, and with him Justices Judith Prakash, Tay Yong Kwang and Steven Chong have been re-designated as Justices of the Court of Appeal. Justices Belinda Ang, Woo Bih Li and Quentin Loh have been appointed as the first Judges of the Appellate Division, with Justice Ang being appointed as its first President. And Justice Loh, who has been the Judge in charge of the Singapore International Commercial Court since 2017, was appointed its President last December. Finally, with Justice Belinda Ang's move to the Appellate Division, I have appointed Justice See Kee Oon to serve as the Judge in charge of the General Division of the High Court.
7. We have retained the expertise of Justices Choo Han Teck, Chan Seng Onn and Lee Seiu Kin, who have been or will be re-appointed as Judges of the High Court for one-year terms. We have also retained the deep experience of three Senior Judges, namely Justices Chao Hick Tin, Andrew Ang and Lai Siu Chiu. Justice Chao has been re-appointed for a two-year term, while Justices Ang and Lai have each been re-appointed for a one-year term. Finally, I am pleased to announce the re-appointment of 16 of our International Judges.

8. I extend my heartiest congratulations to each of my colleagues on their respective appointments and re-appointments. Collectively, these steps will boost the expertise, diversity and strength of the Bench, while also renewing our ranks.
9. Finally, I thank Justice Tan Lee Meng, whose term as a Senior Judge concluded on 4 January this year. I am deeply grateful for his contributions to the Judiciary over the course of almost a quarter of a century. I would also like to record my appreciation to Justice Yasuhei Taniguchi, whose term of office as an International Judge ended on 4 January this year.

III. SECURING FAIRNESS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

10. Let me turn to criminal justice, which has occupied much attention this past year.
11. Over the years, the legislative framework governing the conduct of criminal proceedings has evolved towards securing a better balance between the respective interests of the Prosecution and the Defence. But in a common law system, even the best legislative framework draws life from court judgments, and this is reflected in several significant judgments issued this past year.
12. Securing fairness is crucial to the attainment of justice and order in society. Justice has been described as “the first virtue of social institutions”.¹ In every

¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

society, the cry for justice is primeval and extends both to what is done and what is seen to be done. At its core, the essence of justice is rooted in the innate human instinct for fairness.

13. The courts do not carry the burden of administering justice alone, and are, as you, Mr Attorney, have mentioned, assisted by the Prosecution serving as “ministers of justice” to assist the court in establishing the truth;² and also by the Bar, which has a particular responsibility to maintain the highest professional standards in criminal matters, where life and liberty are at stake. Mr Vijayendran, you mentioned the work of the *pro bono* services arm of the Law Society. Sole proprietors and practitioners in the smaller firms are in fact disproportionately represented in the ranks of those who perform *pro bono* services. Their fidelity in and commitment to promoting access to justice for all is both commendable and inspiring. I have often highlighted and acclaimed the efforts of the many practitioners, who undertake to provide representation and assistance to those in need, without expectation of significant or indeed any remuneration. This is a shining example of the best the Bar has to offer; but let me reiterate that every counsel, whether for the Prosecution or the Defence, are first, officers of the court, and obliged therefore, always to come well-prepared and to assist the court with great diligence in the pursuit of truth and the dispensation of justice.

² *PP v Wee Teong Boo* [2020] SGCA 56 at [136].

14. Within this overarching framework, each institutional player has specific and complementary responsibilities to uphold the integrity of the system. And, at the individual level, each of us must approach our calling to administer justice with devotion and a sincere openness to identifying and remedying any shortcomings. Mr Attorney, you have spoken on measures being taken in your Chambers, including enhancing training and developing internal guidelines to improve investigative work processes.

15. What then of the courts? Because of the weight of judicial office, the quest for a sound system of justice begins with the selection, as Judges and judicial officers, of women and men who have the appropriate temperament, ability and integrity and a firm and unwavering commitment to do their utmost in discharging that office. But even so, judges are not infallible. That is precisely why virtually all judicial structures in the world incorporate a system of corrective procedures such as appeals, so that where something might have gone amiss at first instance, there is the opportunity to set it right. Justice Chan Seng Onn was confronted with that responsibility in Ms Parti Liyani's case. He carefully scrutinised the evidence that had been led, the arguments that were advanced before him and the judgment of the trial court and arrived at his decision for reasons that he explained in considerable detail. Judges are held accountable by and through their judgments, and his speaks eloquently of how and why he came to his conclusions based on the evidence and the arguments that were before him. As the Minister for Law observed in his Statement to Parliament, this was in fact a classic illustration of how the

Rule of Law operates in Singapore: as the Minister put it, before the court, all are equal, and justice is administered according to the facts and the law as seen by the court.³

16. But we must constantly look beyond the fact that we have corrective court procedures that work well. Thus, we too have been working on enhancing the training and development programmes for Judges and judicial officers over the course of recent years. The Singapore Judicial College (“**SJC**”), which has grown from strength to strength since its founding in 2015, is now an integral part of the Judiciary, running a busy and ever-growing calendar of curated programs. It has been developing a Judicial Competency Framework, which will help us to identify and enhance training needs in the necessary competencies at different stages of each officer’s career. We are also increasing the opportunities for High Court Judges to mentor judicial officers in the State and the Family Justice Courts. In addition, I have established a cross-court Knowledge Management Office, overseen by Justice See, which will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices across the entire Judiciary.

³ *Singapore Parliamentary Debates, Official Report* (4 November 2020), vol 95 <<https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/sprs3topic?reportid=ministerial-statement-1529>> at p 14 (accessed 7 January 2021) (K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law).

17. But in the drive always to strive to do ever better, it is important not to overlook the commendable efforts of those who have devoted themselves to the pursuit of justice. Let me make three points in this regard:

(a) First, Judges and prosecutors serve no commercial interest. The *only* interest they serve is to do right by the law. This is a calling of service to society, the proper ordering of which rests on it.

(b) Second, the oath that every Judge takes when assuming office is a solemn personal undertaking to faithfully discharge one's judicial duties and to do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will to the best of one's ability. The oath is a sacred reminder of the responsibilities that we have each been entrusted with, and for the sake of which we individually commit to discharging our duties with utmost resolve, diligence and integrity.

(c) Third, it has been a decade since I have served at or near the apex of the Legal Service Commission and, in that capacity, I have had the opportunity to see first-hand the commitment of our Legal Service Officers. Let me say that it has been a source of immense pride and satisfaction, that our Legal Service Officers are, in the main, outstanding public servants who give their very best and are extremely well regarded as professionals by their counterparts both locally and abroad.

18. This is as it should be because of the nature of the responsibilities we place on their shoulders. Let me focus for a moment on the State Courts, which

have done outstanding work over the years. The State Courts serve as the gateway to the justice system for most litigants in Singapore. Because of this and to ensure that they remain responsive to the needs of users, we conduct surveys regularly to gauge the confidence of our users in the process and the quality of our services. These have been overwhelmingly positive. In the most recent survey, 100% of the respondents agreed that the State Courts administer justice fairly regardless of race, language or religion; 99% agreed that the State Courts dispense justice independently according to the law; and 96% agreed that the State Courts are efficient and deal with cases in a timely manner. These are extremely encouraging and cohere with our sense that vital public institutions in Singapore do seek to do their honest best. This is not something that just happened; but is a legacy that rests on the foundations painstakingly laid by our founding Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, and his colleagues and has been safeguarded and built upon by generations of public servants for more than half a century.

19. These achievements are even more remarkable when seen in the light of the tremendous case load cleared by the State Courts. In 2019, close to 110,000 cases from the criminal justice, civil justice and community justice and tribunals divisions were attended to by 91 judicial officers, which gives us a sense of the considerable workload and responsibility that they shoulder.
20. Over the last six decades, our nation has distinguished herself by her uncompromising fidelity to the Rule of Law. This has been possible because the courts are respected by the Government and by the people. This is

important because the courts are the means by which we, as a society, have agreed our disputes and differences will be resolved. We may harbour strong views about a given case, but when all is said and done, it goes without saying that we must respect the final judicial outcome because, whether or not one agrees with a decision, the process that culminates in it affords us the best means we have for resolving our differences in a way that is fair, honest and conduces to orderly relations. That is precisely why, in his Statement to Parliament, the Minister for Law emphasised time and again that the judgment of the High Court in Ms Parti Liyani's case is final; and that it was neither possible, nor his intention in any way to reopen or question that decision.⁴ That is also why, as you, Mr Vijayendran, have noted, the Law Society acted to defend our courts and the Rule of Law in response to a letter carried in a foreign newspaper. The regard for and trust in the courts that the Government, the Law Society and the vast majority of Singaporeans have, is something I can only describe as extremely precious. It helps our society function well even if we differ on specific issues.

21. For the same reason, it is imperative that one not rush to judgment and condemn errors in the judicial process as suggestive of bad faith or impropriety. Where there is reason to think that there might have been misconduct, steps will be taken in accordance with the applicable processes,

⁴ *Singapore Parliamentary Debates, Official Report* (4 November 2020), vol 95 <<https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/sprs3topic?reportid=ministerial-statement-1529>> at pp 5, 6, 26, and 27 (accessed 7 January 2021) (K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law).

and these must be allowed to take their course. Premature criticism and imputations of bad faith are not only unhelpful but can be antithetical to due process. They undermine, unfairly, public trust and confidence in the very institutions that are fundamental to the Rule of Law.

IV. THE POST- PANDEMIC LEGAL LANDSCAPE

22. Let me turn to the post-pandemic legal landscape and make some observations on what the future may hold for the profession and the Judiciary. Before that, let me briefly outline some aspects of how we actually dealt with what we were confronted with last year.

A. *Response to the pandemic*

23. Here, I want, first, to express my deepest appreciation to the Bar, the Attorney-General's Chambers and all stakeholders for adapting very swiftly in the face of continually and rapidly evolving circumstances as we strived to cope with the demands arising from the pandemic. At each stage of planning and responding to the pandemic, we consulted the Law Society and the Attorney-General's Chambers. It was only by working together, and with the support of the Government in passing the necessary enabling legislation, that we, collectively, succeeded in meeting the initial challenge of maintaining safe and effective access to justice amidst the pandemic.

24. The circuit breaker resulted in the vacation of many hearings, save those that were essential and urgent. As a result, the Court of Appeal lost 19.5 hearing

days, while the High Court Judges and registrars lost 694 hearing days. All cases were promptly re-fixed for hearing, and many have already been substantively disposed of. In the Family Justice Courts (“**FJC**”), there was an estimated loss of 588 hearings days but all held-over hearings have been re-fixed and were commenced by November 2020. In the State Courts, 2,033 hearing days were lost as a result of the vacation of hearings during the circuit breaker period. Nevertheless, with the exception of a very small handful of cases which have yet to be fixed for hearing, cases that were held back by the circuit breaker have either been fixed for hearing or already substantively disposed of. I am deeply grateful to the court users, the Bar, the AGC, the Judges, judicial officers, court administrators and staff who all worked extremely hard to help us complete the past year without building up a new backlog of cases.

B. Trends and responses

25. Let me turn to what I think lies ahead. I make three broad observations.
26. First, the pandemic has been a watershed in the partnership between justice and technology, and it is imperative that we ride this wave, re-imagine our processes and harness the power and potential of technology. The pace with which the courts and the profession successfully pivoted to remote hearings demonstrates that we *can* leverage technology to optimise our processes.
27. In this connection, I am delighted to announce that the Judiciary and the Singapore Academy of Law (“**SAL**”) are working closely with the Ministry of

Law on various initiatives outlined in the Technology and Innovation Roadmap launched in October last year. The Roadmap outlines the Ministry's plans to promote innovation and technology adoption and development in Singapore's legal services sector over the next decade. This includes an initiative which SAL will launch this year to enhance LawNet, thus helping law firms digitalise and increase productivity through the greater use of technology as an essential tool in legal work. This will complement the Ministry's efforts to provide a technology platform for the legal services sector, which the Ministry will announce soon.

28. In line with this, the next-generation LawNet will offer improved search algorithms and personalised features for better research productivity. It will, over the next five years or so, also progressively provide regional legal content to support the profession's regionalisation efforts.
29. Of course, even as we embrace and explore the greater use of technology, we must remain keenly sensitive to the needs of court users who are less technologically equipped or inclined and ensure that technology is an enabler rather than an impediment. We have been conscientious in adopting measures to assist court users on the conduct of remote hearings, through the publication of detailed guides and affording litigants-in-person the option of having their matters heard physically where possible.
30. But we can go further. Thus, we are re-examining how court processes can further be simplified and how information can be channelled to better serve the public. I highlight a few examples:

- (a) First, the Supreme Court, the FJC and the State Courts are working on a single website of the Singapore Judiciary to assist the public in navigating information relating to all our courts.
 - (b) Second, a new e-service for simplified track divorce applications has been created to assist litigants-in-person. The number of litigants-in-person in family justice makes this an essential next step.
 - (c) Third, the courts are also working with SAL on a motor accident outcome simulator, which will aid the parties assess the possible attribution of responsibility and damages in motor accident cases.
31. Let me turn to my second observation, which concerns the qualities that the profession and the Judiciary will need if we are to embrace the transformative potential of technology. Multi-disciplinary teams coming together to improve legal services – for example, lawyers working with data scientists and artificial intelligence specialists – may become the norm. Lawyers will have to learn to collaborate effectively across disciplines and develop capabilities in systems thinking, so that they can acquire an understanding of how technology can be used to enhance their work. The pandemic has shown that change can sometimes be forced upon us, and it can be dangerous and uncontrolled if we are ill-prepared to adapt.
32. I therefore urge all law firms to invest in the upskilling of lawyers and staff. SAL, with the support of the Ministry of Law and the Singapore Institute of Legal Education, will launch the LIFTED-LinkedIn Learning Pathways, a

SkillsFuture Credit-eligible programme which will comprise curated online, on-demand learning from LinkedIn's courses and package these with original content by SAL and its partners. These are useful resources which law firms should take advantage of.

33. Likewise, our law schools and continuing education frameworks must provide firm foundations to enable the profession to be prepared to harness the transformative potential of technology and to ensure that we are turning out professionals with the sort of skills and knowledge that will be needed in the coming decades. I have been in discussions with the Ministers for Law and for Education as well as the Deans of our law schools to address these issues, and those conversations will continue.
34. My third observation is that the economic impact of the pandemic will further accentuate the need for peacebuilding and a shift towards dispute avoidance and containment mechanisms. As the strain of the economic fallout brought about by the pandemic continues to manifest, the current system of adjudication will have to evolve in order to ensure that justice remains accessible. In this connection, I previously suggested that a system of justice that has, at its core, values of peacebuilding and proportionality is one that will provide effective and accessible justice by reducing costs and promoting

the repair of broken relationships and the reinforcement of existing ones.⁵ The current system of adjudication may have to adjust to meet the likely increased demand for complementary or alternative dispute resolution (“**ADR**”) processes, as well as the reality that there will be more litigants navigating the court system without legal representation or advice. This may require us to start thinking beyond a purely adversarial “winner-takes-all” approach in relation to legal services in some areas.

35. The potential for ADR processes which you, Mr Vijayendran, have touched on can be seen, for example, in the SGUnited Mediation Initiative launched by the Supreme Court in collaboration with the Singapore Mediation Centre (“**SMC**”) last year. Suitable cases were referred to SMC for mediation at no charge to the parties. As at 31 December 2020, mediation was completed for 97 cases and, of these, 39 (or about 40%) were successfully settled. This resulted in a saving of more than 252 trial days that would otherwise have been expended in the High Court. I am grateful to SMC and their volunteer mediators for contributing significantly to the success of this initiative.

⁵ Sundaresh Menon CJ, Negotiation and Conflict Management Group (NCMG) ADR Conference 2019: Technology and the Changing Face of Justice (14 November 2019) at paras 56–58: <<https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ncmg---keynote-lecture.pdf>>.

V. ADVANCEMENT OF THE RULE OF LAW IN THE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL SPACE

36. Let me close by highlighting some of the work that we have done this past year and will continue to do, to advance the Rule of Law in the domestic and international space.

A. *Domestic sphere*

37. I begin with civil justice. As I have mentioned, the Appellate Division of the High Court is now operational, and indeed has already received its first filing. This will allow us to utilise our appellate judicial resources more optimally. We can also expect the implementation of the new Rules of Court later this year, which will modernise our civil justice system.

38. Let me also mention the Insolvency, Restructuring and Dissolution Act 2018 which was brought into force last year. This consolidates and updates Singapore's bankruptcy, corporate insolvency and restructuring laws, and aligns them with international best practices, enhancing Singapore's position as an international centre for debt restructuring. The simplified debt restructuring and winding up regimes will offer more affordable and efficient methods of restructuring and liquidation, and will be especially important as the pandemic continues to impact commerce.

39. I turn next to family justice, which is now firmly rooted in therapeutic justice seeking to resolve disputes in a holistic, restorative, and forward-looking manner. Let me mention five initiatives we are working on:

- (a) First, an Advisory Research Council has been established to bring together international thought leaders to share perspectives on therapeutic justice and serve as a resource panel we can consult.
- (b) Second, the FJC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants last year to establish a Panel of Financial Experts. This will assist family Judges with a more objective basis for dividing matrimonial assets. The pilot will commence in the first quarter of this year.
- (c) Third, I have previously spoken of an online portal which will allow litigants-in-person to submit court documents using a document repository and connect them with lawyer-mediators able to assist them with online negotiations. An online FJC Navigation Pack and a series of Video Bites are also being developed as part of this effort to assist court users in understanding and navigating court processes.
- (d) Fourth, the FJC is working with the Ministry of Social and Family Development to strengthen the maintenance enforcement regime, including by facilitating the service of summonses.
- (e) Finally, the Family Justice Rules are being revamped and further simplified, with the revised Rules expected to be implemented by mid-2022.

40. All of these measures are designed to make family justice less acrimonious, more oriented towards constructive outcomes and altogether simpler and more accessible to those who must resort to it.

B. Singapore International Commercial Court

41. I turn next to the Singapore International Commercial Court (“**SICC**”), which has continued to perform excellently over the past year. Faced with extensive travel restrictions, the SICC led the way in some respects by moving to dispose of substantive matters by live video-link. Several SICC cases involved the bench, counsel and witnesses attending from multiple jurisdictions. In one case, parts of the trial even took place after hours to accommodate the examination of expert witnesses based in Europe and the US. A total of 30 published judgments were issued last year, comprising 25 first instance judgments of the SICC and five judgments of the Court of Appeal. The SICC now has a docket of 62 cases, including a recent direct filing concerning a multi-million dollar claim arising from the international sale and purchase of petroleum products.
42. The SICC’s new standard-setting body of procedural rules is also in the final stages of development and will be implemented this year.

C. Singapore International Arbitration Centre

43. Let me also briefly mention the outstanding performance of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (“**SIAC**”), which set a record last year when it crossed the 1000-case threshold. The SIAC has led the remarkable growth

of international arbitration in Singapore, and arbitration is a close partner of the courts in sustaining the Rule of Law. The SIAC's success bolsters Singapore's position as a centre for legal services and an international dispute resolution hub.

D. International relations with our counterparts

44. We have also continued to contribute actively to international conversations and engagements and to deepen our ties with our foreign counterparts. I highlight a few examples:

(a) The fourth iteration of the Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable was conducted by video-conference last November. We shared our experiences, exchanged insights and jointly launched a compendium of international commercial cases from Singapore and China, curated for their relevance to the Belt and Road Initiative. And signalling the strength of our relations, Justice Steven Chong was appointed to the International Commercial Expert Committee of the Supreme People's Court.

(b) We also participated in various virtual meetings, including the meeting of the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices and a bilateral Chief Justice's dialogue with our counterparts from South Korea.

(c) Looking ahead, the State Courts are working to establish an International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network, which is a network of judiciaries collaborating to develop frameworks that will promote the

early, amicable and fair resolution of court disputes without trial. This will be done by resorting to judge-led dispute resolution processes such as judicial mediation, early neutral evaluation and judge-directed negotiations.

(d) I also mentioned last year that we anticipated organising a symposium on developments in international commercial litigation, on the side of the third meeting of the Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts, which we were to have hosted. These events had to be postponed due to the pandemic, but they will be proceeding in March 2021 as virtual events. Let me highlight the SICC Symposium, which has been re-scheduled as a live webinar on 10 March 2021, with a distinguished line up of speakers. There will be in-depth discussions on the forthcoming new SICC rules, emerging trends and opportunities for commercial courts and other dispute resolution options in a post-pandemic world, the enforceability of court judgments and the role of commercial courts in cross-border insolvency disputes. The Symposium affords an excellent opportunity to stay abreast of the latest developments in international commercial litigation and I encourage those of you with an interest to register.

(e) Finally, the SJC has continued to engage our international counterparts, including by organising the Judicial Education Masterclass held in collaboration with the US Federal Judicial Center and a joint pedagogy seminar with the China National Judges College. The SJC also entered

into a landmark memorandum of understanding with the US National Center for State Courts.

45. Our continued participation in foreign exchanges and engagements is a testament to our commitment to the Rule of Law both domestically and internationally. They also evince the international community's trust and confidence in the integrity of our institutions, and the value ascribed to our contributions to these important discussions.

46. Perhaps the best manifestation of these points can be seen in the work and achievements of the Asian Business Law Institute ("**ABLI**"), established just five years ago with the weighty mission of promoting the convergence of commercial laws in Asia. ABLI has punched well beyond its weight in that time. This past year, it partnered the International Insolvency Institute ("**III**"), in April and launched "Corporate Restructuring and Insolvency in Asia 2020", a compendium of reports examining the corporate restructuring and insolvency regimes in 16 jurisdictions in the Asia-Pacific region. Looking ahead, the ABLI-III project aims to make recommendations as to how jurisdictions may collaborate more effectively on in-court and out-of-court workouts. In September, ABLI released the "Asian Principles for the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Asia", the first such publication anywhere in the world. The Asian Principles seek to promote convergence in this area and so to advance the portability of judgments within ASEAN and its major trading partners. In November, the ABLI Data Privacy Project was selected from 850 submissions coming from 115 countries to be presented at

the Paris Peace Forum, an annual conference where heads of State, international organisations, top industry leaders and NGOs meet to construct new forms of collective action regarding global governance issues. And just a couple of days ago, we learnt that ABLI's Comparative Analytical Review on Data Transfers Regulations in Asia, that was published last May, has been honoured with the Privacy Papers for Policymakers Award, by the Future of Privacy Forum, the leading privacy think tank in the US. ABLI's publication has been selected from among dozens of applications as a "must-read" for policymakers on privacy issues. This is the first time in the 10-year history of the award that a paper focused on Asian laws has been selected and the team will be presenting its work at an event to be attended by policymakers, privacy professionals and academics in February. I highlight these achievements because they validate our long-held belief that we do have a significant role to play in advancing multilateralism and the Rule of Law even beyond our shores; and that it is well worth expending the effort to do anything we can in the law's effort to make things better.

VI. APPOINTMENT OF SENIOR COUNSEL

47. I have reached the point in my response where I announce the appointment of Senior Counsel. The Selection Committee has decided to appoint as Senior Counsel this year:

(A) Mr Vergis S Abraham;

(B) Ms Tan Ruyan Kristy; and

(C) Professor Goh Yihan.

48. I congratulate each of the appointees and look forward to their continued contributions to the profession.

VII. CONCLUSION

49. Let me close by thanking all of you in the profession for working with us to administer justice in trying circumstances this past year. The dramatic challenges we all faced have highlighted the importance of our work and also the value to be had when we come together in a spirit of trust and collaboration. We must continue to embrace this spirit as we ready ourselves to seize the opportunities that lie ahead of us. I have every confidence that we will pull together, as we have always done, to ensure justice for all.

50. Thank you all very much for your presence this morning. On behalf of the Judiciary, I wish all of you a happy, healthy and fulfilling New Year.
