

Judiciary Volunteers Appreciation Dinner 2019
Opening Remarks

Friday, 11 October 2019

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon
Supreme Court of Singapore

1. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for attending this year's Judiciary Volunteers Appreciation Dinner. We first started this dinner event in 2016, and it has since become an annual affair at which the State Courts, the Family Justice Courts, and the Supreme Court come together to recognise and to express our appreciation for the contributions of all our volunteers. Looking across the room, it gives me great pleasure to see many familiar faces from the last couple of dinners, and I am equally delighted to see some new faces join us this evening.

2. Tonight we record our appreciation to the approximately 400 volunteers and committee members who have selflessly dedicated their time and energy to the various *pro bono* committees and initiatives of the Judiciary. As I mentioned in my address last year, our volunteers are key to the success of our various initiatives to guide and help members of the public as they navigate the legal process, because most of them will be unfamiliar and daunted by what they must go through. We are therefore heartened and greatly encouraged by your enthusiasm and by the steady and robust number of you who have graciously come forward to help us in our mission. We hope

this welcoming trend that we have observed across all three courts – that a wonderful spirit of service and volunteerism has firmly taken root in the profession, especially amongst our younger members and law students – will continue.

3. The *pro bono* spirit is, of course, not a recent phenomenon. I am pleased to announce, therefore, that this evening we will be awarding, for the first time this year, LASCO Long Service Awards to recognise volunteers who have contributed to the Legal Assistance for Capital Offenders (“LASCO”) scheme for more than 25 years. The LASCO scheme has had a storied history and over the years, its success has rested on a corps of volunteer lawyers. The undertaking to assist a criminal defendant in even a single capital matter is no easy task. The 7 individuals we honour tonight have tirelessly worked in the defence of many such defendants on a *pro bono* basis over the course of their legal careers. Their compassion and dedication is truly admirable, and on behalf of the Judiciary, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to each and every one of them for the many years of service that they have rendered.

4. I would like to mention, in particular, the contributions of the late Mr Suppiah s/o Pakrisamy to whom the LASCO Long Service Award will be presented posthumously this evening. A recent feature in The Straits Times portrayed Mr Suppiah as a dedicated and unstoppable force, both in the courtroom and on the golf course. This award, however, recognises only his

sterling contributions to the profession's *pro bono* efforts. I believe I speak for all of us when I say that Mr Suppiah's passing is a loss to the profession and he will be deeply missed.

5. Like Mr Suppiah, each of you contribute significantly and tangibly to the work of our courts in very many different ways. Take for example the Court Volunteer Mediators at the State Courts who generously give their time to assist litigants in resolving their disputes amicably through mediation. In doing so, they reduce the scope for acrimony and help the litigants find prompt closure to a stressful chapter in their lives. These volunteer mediators sacrifice their time not only in the services they render, but they also attend regular training sessions to ensure that they are up to date with mediation skills and techniques. In the last three years, our group of volunteer mediators handled 10% of the yearly average of 10,400 cases in the State Courts that underwent mediation, and together with our in-house mediators, they have helped maintain an overall settlement rate of above 80%. Over the years, this dedicated group of volunteers has indeed become an integral part of the work of the State Courts.

6. There is one other individual whom I have the privilege of introducing today, and he is Mr Azmi Hassan. Azmi is an ex-offender who was incarcerated for more than 10 years' in total for various drug offences. But he has come a long way since his release in 2015. While serving his time in

prison, Azmi participated in the Yellow Ribbon Song Writing Competition and developed an interest in singing and songwriting. He continued to pursue his passion after his release and, in 2017, he even performed at an event where the Prime Minister was the Guest of Honour. I am delighted that we will have the privilege of having him sing to us tonight.

7. Azmi's journey exemplifies a life well led after his exit from our penal system, and his story reflects the hopefulness that is inherent in the administration of our criminal justice system as a whole. As our courts continue to strive to uphold the fair and compassionate system of justice, we are acutely aware that we can only achieve this with your help. We are deeply grateful that all of you selflessly give us your invaluable support. This is simply indispensable. Be assured that each of you is making a real difference, especially to the litigants who lack the resources or the legal awareness to make their way through the system.

8. Please allow me to sincerely thank each and every one of you again for your effort and contribution, and may I extend my heartiest congratulations to all of the award winners this evening.

9. Thank you so much, and I wish you all a wonderful evening ahead.