

JUDICIARY VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATION DINNER 2018

WEDNESDAY, 3 OCTOBER 2018

OPENING REMARKS

BY

CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON

1. Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this year's Judiciary Volunteers Appreciation Dinner. This evening marks the third time that the State Courts, the Family Justice Courts and the Supreme Court have come together as one to extend our sincere gratitude to our volunteers for their hard work and contributions across all three courts.
2. In addition to our valued volunteers, we have another special group of people present with us today. These are our generous and selfless committee members, who contribute significantly towards the work of the Judiciary by volunteering to serve on various committees. On behalf of the Judiciary, thank you all very much for your support of and dedication to the administration of justice.
3. Let me first say how gratified I am to see that our volunteer numbers remain very healthy. We have 122 committee members and 328 volunteers serving the courts. That makes a total of 450 wonderful women and men helping us administer justice, for no reason other than the belief that it is the right thing to do. While this is an excellent record, of course, more can always be done. At last year's Appreciation Dinner, I referred to three broad areas that we could

focus on to strengthen the spirit of service. One of these was to encourage volunteering among our young lawyers as early as possible. In that vein, some weeks ago during the Mass Call, I emphasised to our newly-minted lawyers that by embracing *pro bono* work, they will come to appreciate how their skills and knowledge can make an immense difference in the lives of others. Undertaking *pro bono* work is truly one of the greatest sources of satisfaction that lawyers can have in their professional lives.

4. But our young lawyers cannot do it alone. As I mentioned in my address at the Opening of the Legal Year, senior lawyers have an active role to play: first, by dispelling any notion that volunteering entails a trade-off in career progression; second, by giving their juniors due recognition for their *pro bono* efforts; and third, by actively encouraging them to do this. Indeed, it seems to me that a proper spirit of service cannot be forged without a paradigm shift in mind-set that must start from the senior lawyers, whose privilege it is to set the direction for their firms. On the other hand, it should also extend to our schools, by encouraging greater student participation in legal clinics and the like. In short, if we are going to achieve real and tangible change in improving public access to professional legal services, then we must see coordinated and concerted efforts from all levels and segments of the legal community.
5. In line with this, I am delighted to announce the launch of two meaningful initiatives that will benefit our court users in very tangible ways. These two initiatives are excellent examples of how various segments of our community

are collaborating in an innovative way to develop new means to reach out to the public as part of our collective efforts to make justice truly accessible.

6. The first of these is spearheaded by the Family Justice Courts, in collaboration with the Law Society Pro Bono Services Office, the Community Justice Centre and the Singapore University of Social Sciences. The initiative is titled “About Family Justice: Divorce in Singapore – What you need to know”, and its target audience are those who are contemplating or going through divorce proceedings. The aim of the initiative is to provide practical guidance to litigants through public talks, videos and other informative collateral such as this brochure and leaflet on the divorce process and procedure, and also about the help services that will be available to these parties at various stages.

7. The second initiative, known as the “Witness Orientation Toolkit”, is led by the State Courts in collaboration with Hagar Singapore, the Community Justice Centre, and the NUS Centre for Pro Bono & Clinical Legal Education. As many of us would know, the criminal justice process can be confusing and intimidating especially for the layperson. So the aim of the toolkit is to provide witnesses with a helpful route map to navigate this unfamiliar territory, addressing basic and essential subjects such as the nature of court proceedings, the various parties involved, and the dos and don’ts for a witness. The toolkit will consist of printed material as well as online resources and will cover different classes of witnesses, including the elderly and the vulnerable. This will be done over time but let me mention that among the materials are two picture books for children titled “Who Will Be In Court” and “Sara Goes To Court”, the artwork for which

was done by a young lady by the name of Jolie Lim, a student at Pathlight Secondary. This is collaboration at its best and it is truly inspiring!

8. Both initiatives are currently still in their pilot or early phases. In their final form, most of the material will progressively be made available to the public in all four official languages. I am confident that these initiatives will join the efforts already underway and launched in previous years, and further advance our joint efforts to assist and guide the public when using our courts. Key to the success of these initiatives is the continued willingness of all our volunteers to contribute to the cause. I know I can count on all of you for this and I encourage everyone here to continue to work hand in hand with us to foster the spirit of service.

9. Finally, let me extend my heartiest congratulations to all our award winners. I wish all of you a wonderful evening!