

**SPEECH BY MS INDRANEE RAJAH,
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AT THE INAUGURAL NUS PRO BONO AWARDS CEREMONY
ON 2 MARCH 2016 AT NUS BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS**

Professor Simon Chesterman, Dean, National University of Singapore Faculty of Law,

Faculty Members,

Students of NUS Law School,

1. Good morning. Two years ago, I was on this campus at the launch of the Start Now Law online portal. The portal provided a platform for students such as yourselves to find pro bono opportunities at partner institutions like the State Courts, the Pro Bono Services Office, and the Legal Aid Bureau.
2. Through pro bono work, the legal profession gives back to society and this helps many of us to rediscover the nobility of our profession. The journey of giving back should begin during your time as law students, and that is why I am very pleased to be back here two years later, as part of your inaugural awards ceremony, to recognise the outstanding efforts of your seniors and fellow classmates in pro bono work.
3. In the course of your work, you will have experienced working with people from different walks of life. People whom you have never met before. You would have been excited and satisfied when you found that you were able to help them, and that is because, even as law students, you are able to assist those in need with your legal knowledge and skills, and you will be able to do much more when you graduate and are called to the Bar and get your practising certificates.
4. The Government is doing much more to help those in our society with limited means gain access to legal assistance and representation. However, the

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success of these efforts depends greatly on the legal fraternity and its active participation in pro bono work, so I would urge you to continue in your passion to provide legal assistance and representation to the indigent and the vulnerable, long after you have graduated and joined the legal profession. It is worthwhile and meaningful work that can really make a difference.

5. Today, I am happy to recognise the efforts of students who have contributed towards improving access to justice and legal protection for vulnerable individuals. They have displayed imagination, dedication, initiative and drive in their pro bono work, and have inspired others to work with them. To this day, they continue with their pro bono efforts because they believe in the cause.
6. Each of the award recipients today receives recognition but I would like to say a few words about the recipient of the first NUS Pro Bono Champion Award. That is Ng Bin Hong, who was from NUS Law Class of 2014, and now an associate at Lee & Lee. During his time in NUS Law, Bin Hong was a champion for pro bono. He initiated and led many projects, including free legal clinics, and I also learned that Bin Hong spearheaded a NUS Adult Protection Research Team that worked with the Family Violence Specialist Centres. The team collected information and compiled research on legal issues relating to vulnerable adults. The research tied in closely with Bin Hong's final year thesis paper on the Mental Capacity Act, and the thesis was also presented to Members of Parliament and the relevant government officials who are looking into improving the legal framework relating to mentally incapacitated persons. Bin Hong continued his work through his Bar course and training contract, and is now actively taking on pro bono representation.
7. But in addition to the support of lawyers like Bin Hong, pro bono efforts also require financial support. So, to that end, I am grateful that RHTLaw Taylor Wessing and the NUS Law Class of 1992 are investing in pro bono and have stepped up to provide financial support for student pro bono efforts, and I hope that through the RHTLaw Taylor Wessing Subhas Anandan Pro Bono Award and the NUS Law Class of 1992 Pro Bono Awards, worthy student pro bono projects will receive the financial backing they deserve.

8. I am very encouraged by the fact that competition for the awards has been keen. Many innovative projects at NUS Law were vying for the financial resources, and I congratulate the NUS Law students and the student pro bono groups such as the Innocence Project (Singapore), the Criminal Justice Club, the Military Justice Project and the NUS Adult Protection Research Team for their creativity and innovation.
9. As law students, you are in a unique position of knowing what the law is, how and why it matters to people, and what to do when faced with a legal problem. As you give of your time and skills to help disadvantaged individuals resolve their legal issues, I hope that the issues and the law will come alive for you. This will be a great opportunity for you to pick up soft skills in interacting with clients which only come with hands on experience. These soft skills will serve you well in your future professional careers as well as your personal lives. You will also come to understand the important role you play in strengthening access to justice, for the benefit of the community at large. We all have our part to play in this, whether as the Government, lawyers or students.
10. So congratulations once again to the award winners, and a big thank you to the students and the donors for your contributions.

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