

**Address by Senior Minister of State for Law, Ms Indranee Rajah, to
the Inaugural Cohort of the UniSIM School of Law**

Let me start by thanking UniSIM for inviting me to address all of you on what is an historic occasion.

1. You are the inaugural class of a new law school, only the third in Singapore's history.
2. Let me show you a photo.
3. This is the first cohort which graduated from the then newly minted law faculty of the University of Malaya, later to become SU and then NUS.
4. You may not recognise the individuals in this photo, but you know many of them by reputation.
5. Let me highlight some of them. This is their graduation photo. From left to right they are:
 - i. Chan Sek Keong
 - AG (May 1992 – Apr 2006)

- CJ (Apr 2006 – Nov 2012)

ii. Amarjeet Singh, SC

- Senior Consultant, Litigation & Dispute Resolution, KhattarWong
- Judicial Commissioner (1992 to 2000)
- Ad litem Judge with the UN war crimes tribunal for the Balkans at the Hague (2001 – 2005)

iii. Tommy Koh

- Ambassador-At-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Special Adviser, Institute of Policy Studies, NUS
- Chairman, Centre for International Law, NUS
- Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Singapore (1971-1974)

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iv. Goh Yong Hong

- Commissioner of Police (1979 – 1992)
- Singapore's longest serving police chief
- First lawyer to hold the job of police commissioner of Singapore

v. Koh Eng Tian

- Solicitor-General (1981 – 1991)
- Appointed in 1997 one of the first two Senior Counsel in Singapore.

vi. Thio Su Mien

- Senior Executive Director, TSMP Law Corporation (Retired)
- She was the first alumna to join the teaching staff in 1962, and in 1968, became the first woman, first local graduate, and youngest person ever to be elected Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Singapore (1968 – 1971).
- She also had a stint as a judge in the World Bank Administrative Tribunal and after her term, was Senior Vice President of the World Bank.

vii. Nesadevi Sandrasegara

- A legal officer by training, Nesadevi joined the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) in 1971 and was due to retire after spending 25 years with PSA.
- However, she offered to continue contributing to the maritime sector and was instrumental in setting up the Legal Department in the newly-formed MPA in 1996.

- When Singapore experienced one of its worst oil spills in 1997 from the tanker 'Evoikos', Nesadevi cut short her holidays to assist MPA in the oil spill claims.

viii. Koh Kheng Lian

- Emeritus Professor, Faculty of Law, NUS
- Founder and Director, Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Law (APCEL)

ix. T P B Menon

- Consultant, Wee Swee Teow & Co.
- Former Law Society president (1980-1983).

x. Sachi Saurajen

- Crown Counsel and former Deputy Public Prosecutor
- Formerly a Joint Managing Partner in Drew & Napier with Dr

Thio Su Mien

6. This photo captures a moment in time – the first class of a brand new law school of the colony of Singapore. They wouldn't have known at

the time the photo was taken that within 2 years they would be practicing in a federation and that within another two years after that, they would be lawyers of an independent nation.

7. Just as they couldn't have predicted that future, they couldn't also have known what they as individuals would go on to accomplish or what contributions they would make to the new sovereign state of Singapore.

8. But accomplish great things they did, each trailblazers in their own right in diverse fields - judiciary, public and private sector, diplomatic service, academia.

9. Today, 55 years later, we once again have a new law school and a first cohort.

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10. You are that new cohort.

11. All of you are here for your own personal aspirations and ambitions.

12. However, being part of this cohort goes far beyond that.
13. You represent a new direction - for this law school, for this university and for Singapore.
14. You will, if things work out as planned, be the vanguard of change in the practice of family and criminal law.
15. You will, if you live up to the expectation of you, make a difference in the community and our society.
16. You are also part of a bold new approach in tertiary education, of which I will say more later.

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17. Because you are the inaugural cohort, all eyes will be upon you.
18. This law school will be judged by your achievements.
19. The students who come after you will look to you as role models.

20. People's lives will be affected by your conduct as lawyers.
21. So, no pressure. But I wanted to make sure that you understand the significance of being the inaugural cohort of the UniSIM School of Law, because it is no light thing.

Vanguard of Change in Family and Criminal Law

22. As mentioned earlier, the vision is that you will be the vanguard of change in the practice of family and criminal law. Let me explain.
23. First – the UniSIM School of Law is intended to be an important pipeline of family and criminal lawyers, including Syariah lawyers.
24. There is a constant and steady demand for family and criminal law services.

25. Services to meet this demand have been expanded by the Enhanced Criminal Legal Aid scheme as well as the revisions to the means test which allows more people to qualify for civil Legal Aid.

26. However there is an impending shortage of family and criminal lawyers.
27. There are currently about 1600 family and criminal lawyers.
28. Roughly 10% are over age 65.
29. Over the next decade an average of 30 will reach 65 each year.
30. Yet fewer young lawyers have been entering or remaining these 2 areas of practice. The reason most commonly given by them is the emotional toll of working in these areas. Most do not have the maturity or life experience to enable them to handle the stresses and strains of family and criminal practice.

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31. That is the reason why we stipulated that 80% of each Cohort should be mature students with prior work experience. We believe that individuals with work and life experience under their belt will be better equipped to handle the specific rigours of family and criminal practice.

32. Second - it's not just an issue of the quantity; even as we seek to boost the number of lawyers practising family and criminal law, we are also mindful of the need for quality.
33. With this law school we intend to bring the practice of family and criminal law to a whole new level.
34. Unlike commercial law, where at the end of the day it is really about money, in family and criminal law it is very much about people, relationships and society.
35. In family law you deal with disputes that can tear people and families apart. The effects can be traumatic and long lasting, especially on the children.

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36. Criminal law has to do with how we govern our society

- to prosecute and stand for the victim if you are a prosecutor;

- to stand for the accused and advance the best possible defence with liberty and sometimes life at stake, if you are defence counsel;

- to acquit or punish fairly and justly if you are the judge.

37. As family and criminal lawyers therefore, the impact of what you do goes far beyond just money. It has a great impact on people's lives, and also determines the kind of society that we are.

38. We want family lawyers who will apply both the letter and the spirit of our recent family law reforms - where it's not about simply winning or losing, but rather more about helping people through their family difficulties.

39. Here the lawyer plays a very important role - you can make a big difference in whether the litigation experience is nasty and acrimonious or whether parties can disengage in as civil and least painful manner possible and move on with their lives.

40. And always remember that marital disputes can have a huge impact on the children. They are often caught in a tug-of-war between the parents. Your role as a family lawyer includes, where necessary, helping to open the parents' eyes to how their actions may affect the children and acting in the best interests of the child.

41. You will have to be more than just a lawyer. You will have to be a wise counsellor, a mediator, a builder of bridges, a guide, a friend - while all the time maintaining your professional objectivity and doing your duty as an advocate and solicitor.

42. In the practice of criminal law, we want criminal lawyers who understand the importance of the social role you play; we want the highest ethical standards with the very best of skills, especially in cross-examination with a view to bringing the truth to light.

43. We want a criminal justice system that balances the needs of society and individual rights.

44. We need prosecutors who can stand for the victims of crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable.

45. At the same time we need defence counsel who can speak for the accused and spare no efforts in advancing the best possible defence on their behalf, because life and liberty is at stake.

46. And we need good judges with a keen and compassionate understanding of human nature and a strong sense of justice who can, at the end of the day, when everything is balanced in the scales, make decisions which are right, and fair and just.

47. While I certainly hope you will all graduate with good grades and a good class of honours, please know and understand that that is not the ultimate measure of your success. The ultimate measure of your success will be how you use your ability as lawyers to make a difference.

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48. For those in government, the measure of your success will be whether the law degree you obtain here helps you develop policy and legislation better - with a deep understanding of the human condition with all its complexities, and working within that to achieve our national, social objectives as a sovereign nation.

49. For those going to AGC, the measure of your success will be in the quality of advice you provide to government, its practicality and utility to agencies to resolve the complex issues faced by government day to day; it will also be measured the thoroughness and outcomes of your prosecutions or civil actions.

50. For those going into the private sector, your measure of success is this: - are you the first name that springs to mind when a person facing divorce proceedings needs help? Do you have a reputation for being a sensitive, discreet, skilled lawyer who can resolve matrimonial proceedings with minimum acrimony and yet achieve the results your client wants, like Californian divorce lawyer Laura Wasser who has represented Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie in their respective divorce cases? Ms Wasser has even published a whole book based on her personal philosophy and professional experience on how to have a divorce that keeps both parties' sanity, wallet and dignity intact—and their children safe, sound, and emotionally healthy.

51. Likewise for criminal practice - if someone is facing a criminal charge with life or liberty at stake, are you the one they immediately think of to represent them?
52. Above all - the measure of your success is if society and members of the public look at what you do and say - "This lawyer really helped me. He/she made a positive difference to my life. Now I understand why the law is a noble profession."
53. Hence the real measure of your success - and the success of this law school - will be in terms of real impact you make in the lives of real people in real life.
54. I should also dispel the notion that practising family and criminal law means that you will only be doing domestic work. With globalisation and cross-border interactions, both these areas of law increasingly have international aspects. Crime has become transnational. The internet has also made crime borderless - eg with the click of a mouse you can move illegal monies across borders. In family law, marriages between people of different nationalities who are globally mobile, have raised complex jurisdictional issues of custody, cross-cultural issues

and assets located in different jurisdictions. Family lawyers now need to be familiar not only with domestic law but international conventions, e.g. the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

55. Also, we benchmark ourselves against international practices, standards and developments. Chief Justice Menon established an International Advisory Council for the Family Justice Courts last year to help situate FJC at the forefront of family court practice. The Council brings together a group of internationally renowned and respected family judges, academics and experts in family law and social science.

56. On the criminal justice front, Singapore was ranked 4th globally for “Criminal Justice” in the World Justice Project’s Rule of Law Index

2016. The Criminal Justice factor measures whether criminal investigation, adjudication and correctional systems are effective,

whether the criminal justice system is impartial, free of corruption, free of improper influence, and protective of due process and the rights of

the accused.

57. It is my hope therefore that you will not only be specialists in domestic law, but also au fait with the international aspects of family and criminal law and in due course become recognised as experts at a regional and international level.

58. **Bold New Approach in tertiary education.**

59. It was with these ultimate objectives in mind that we developed the underlying philosophy of the UniSIM School of Law and designed its pedagogy. The result is a bold new approach. You are a law school with a difference, whose mission is to make a difference.

A different way of selecting

60. Entry to this law school is a departure from the traditional mode of university selection.

61. As you would know, having gone through the selection process, admission to this law school is not based on historical academic grades alone. There is of course a requisite level of academic ability, but that is not the sole determinant.

62. You were also chosen for your aptitude for the practice of, and passion for criminal or family law.
63. Because of the importance of emotional maturity and life experience in the practice of family and criminal law, 80% of the places are earmarked for mature students.
64. The relevance of your prior work experience is also taken into account.
65. For the 20% who are fresh from JC or poly, we hope that interaction with older students will generate benefits that go both ways - you can draw lessons from their experience; they will develop broader insights from being plugged into your more youthful perspectives.

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66. This puts SkillsFuture into practice and illustrates what PM said at NDR 2015 about how SkillsFuture “provides Singaporeans with opportunities to develop to their full potential, whatever their starting point may be.”

A different way of teaching

67. The pedagogy for this law school is also different.
68. There will be a strong emphasis on practical skills - this will be infused into the curriculum and reinforced through the 6 month mandatory practicum.
69. This is so that when you graduate, you will not only be lawyers, you will also be practitioners.
70. And because as practitioners you must have knowledge and skills that go beyond the law, the curriculum is multidisciplinary.

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71. You will be able to take courses like Social Work and Social Services in Singapore, as well as Introduction to Forensics. Those specialising in family law can take complementary non-law electives like Introduction to Counselling.

72. Those specialising in criminal law can take electives like Criminology and Introduction to Psychology.
73. This multidisciplinary approach is designed to enable you to become real specialists in your chosen fields.
74. This is also why, in time to come, your law school will be co-located with the State Courts and Family Court complex, where criminal trials and family disputes are fought out. This will put you in the heart of the action, an immersive experience to prepare you for practice.

Technology

75. Next, let me say something about technology. Lawyers and technology are not always the best of friends. While we certainly have the basics of email and e-filing, the legal sector and lawyers are not usually perceived as the first adopters of new technology and this is not without justification.

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76. One major reason is mindset and force of habit. If people have been conducting their business in a particular way for many years, there is often inertia against change.

77. But technology is making inroads into everything and bringing about change. The legal sector will be no exception.

78. It is therefore imperative that during your time at UniSIM, you learn to embrace technology and remain open to it for the rest of your life.

79. Technology is important in 2 respects - it will be part of the substantive content of cases, and to increase productivity and innovation.

80. The next 10 years and beyond will see a huge expansion in the digital economy. We will be moving into the age of the Internet of Things. Our Smart Nation project is also underway. As the real world becomes increasingly IT enabled, you can expect crime to be correspondingly committed more and more through digital means. This is already happening.

81. You may recall the series of high-profile cyber-attacks in Singapore in 2013, carried out by a computer hacker who dubbed himself “Messiah”. He defaced a web page of the PAP Community Foundation, and also illegally accessed and modified content on servers of the Ang Mo Kio Town Council’s website, The Straits Times blogs, a fan site for Sun Ho, and Fuji Xerox. The Fuji Xerox hack attack compromised a server containing data belonging to 650 of Standard Chartered Bank’s clients. Last year, the police also reported a spike in cheating cases involving e-commerce, credit-for-sex scams and Internet love scams (many of which were run by overseas syndicates targeting Singaporeans). One of the most audacious examples of international cybercrime was the 2016 Bangladesh Bank heist. (Bangladesh Bank is the Central Bank of Bangladesh.) Last February, perpetrators attempted to steal US\$951 million from the Bangladesh Bank’s account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Five out of 35 transaction requests were granted: US\$20 million was nearly transferred to a Sri Lankan company (the transaction was only halted, thanks to a misspelling of the word “Foundation” as “Fundation”); and US\$81 million was deposited in five separate accounts in the Philippines opened under fictitious identities. Most of the US\$81 million has yet to be recovered. As Manhattan district attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. said: "The internet is the crime scene of the 21st century."

82. Criminal investigations too will increasingly be led by technology. Hence both prosecution and defence lawyers will need to be familiar with technology to do their jobs effectively. That is the reason IT Essentials is part of your curriculum.

83. Beyond dealing with technology as part of the subject matter of your cases, it is also important to leverage technology for productivity and innovation. At the simpler levels this involves systems like practice management or document management software. At a higher level, legal technology will replace many of the time-consuming tasks done by lawyers today eg research and discovery. Data analytics will be a game changer in legal business if used correctly. AI for legal research is not a far-fetched concept; it is already a reality. There are companies now working on the development of predictive technology to predict the likely outcomes of legal cases based on available data. The possibilities are endless.

84. Therefore if you want to be at the forefront of practice, embrace technology and innovation - on a continuing and lifelong basis. Break the mould and lead the way as lawyers who are best friends with

technology. Make tech savviness and innovativeness the distinctive hallmark of a UniSim law graduate.

Conclusion

85. This is your class, your cohort. There is a bright future ahead of you, depending on what you make of it. Future generations will look back to your class and say “It started here.” This is both privilege and responsibility. Take it on. Do well. And make a difference.

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