

RESPONSE BY CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON
OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2026

Monday, 12 January 2026

Mr Attorney,

Professor Tan,

Honoured guests,

Members of the Bar,

Ladies and gentlemen:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Welcome to the Opening of this Legal Year. I am especially grateful to the Honourable Chief Justice Chiv Keng and Justice Synn Sovannrath of the Supreme Court of Cambodia, the Honourable Afonso Carmona, Chief Justice and President of the Court of Appeal of Timor-Leste, and the Honourable Deputy Chief Justice Suharto and Justice I Gusti Agung Sumanatha of the Supreme Court of Indonesia for travelling to Singapore, and to all our guests for joining us this morning.
2. We marked many milestones last year. We celebrated the first decade of the Singapore International Commercial Court, the 40th anniversary of the Small Claims Tribunals, the 10th anniversary of the Singapore Judicial College, and the opening of the new home of the Family Justice Courts at the “Octagon” building. But this year, as you have both observed, we look forward to

celebrating a landmark of even broader significance: the 200th anniversary of the Second Charter of Justice, which marks the bicentennial of not only our courts, but also the legal system of modern Singapore. This is an opportunity to both celebrate our progress and survey the road ahead.

II. FELICITATIONS

3. Before I turn to that, let me acknowledge the changes to the Bench last year. We welcomed Judicial Commissioners Sushil Nair and Low Siew Ling, as well as International Judges Justices David John Goddard and Sir Nigel Teare, who will each contribute their unique experiences and skills. I congratulate them, and thank them for answering the call to serve.
4. Let me also warmly congratulate –
 - (a) Justices Ang Cheng Hock and Hri Kumar Nair, who were appointed Justices of the Court of Appeal; and
 - (b) Justices Alex Wong, Kristy Tan and Christopher Tan, who were appointed Judges of the High Court.
5. I also extend my deepest appreciation to Justice Vincent Hoong, who retired after decades of distinguished service to the Judiciary and to Singapore, with the last five years as Presiding Judge of the State Courts (“PJSC”). Justice Hoong did an outstanding job leading the State Courts in particular through the pandemic and into a new era marked by considerable change. I am deeply grateful for his support to me over more than a decade, first as Registrar of the Supreme Court and then as PJSC. Justice Christopher Tan will succeed

him as PJSC, and I have every confidence that the State Courts will continue to flourish under his leadership.

6. I also congratulate you, Professor Tan, on your appointment as President of the Law Society. I look forward to working with you in strengthening the partnership between the Bench and the Bar. All that we have accomplished in Singapore can be traced to the willingness of our stakeholders to pull together for our shared interests, or as you have eloquently put it, our bond of fraternity. It is my hope that this unity and sense of social responsibility which you spoke about, will continue to underpin our community's efforts to meet the challenges that lie ahead of us.
7. Finally, as you have both mentioned, last year saw the passing of Mr Warren Khoo. Mr Khoo made many valuable contributions to Singapore, including on the Bench, and for a time as Chairman of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre. We were fortunate to have benefited from his service and he will be fondly remembered.

III. THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

8. Let me return to our plans for the Bicentennial celebrations, which commemorates the remarkable story of our courts and legal system. That story belongs not only to the legal profession but also to the wider public whom we serve.
9. Through the celebrations, we intend to recount that story and acknowledge the foundations laid by our predecessors. Central to this, is a commemorative

book titled “The Singapore Judiciary – A Bicentennial History”, co-edited by Senior Judge Andrew Phang and Deputy Attorney-General Goh Yihan. And, through outreach events, we will share it with the community, including young Singaporeans and students, emphasising the important truth that the legal and judicial system is *their* institution – to serve their needs, safeguard their rights, and undergird our nation’s social compact.

10. To the same end, the Supreme Court will host a year-long exhibition curated by the Singapore Academy of Law (“SAL”) which will trace the legal evolution of modern Singapore. This will allow the public to better understand our legal history and the role of the courts in upholding the rule of law. The exhibition is at level 2 of the Supreme Court building and it opens today.
11. We have also commissioned a commemorative medallion for the Bicentennial. As attendees at the Opening of our Bicentennial Legal Year, each of you will be among the first recipients of the medallion. We will present the medallion during the year to guests, young lawyers and others. It is now my pleasure to launch the official logo of the Bicentennial, which you may see on the screens around the auditorium.
12. The celebrations will reach their apex at the Bicentennial Celebration Week in November, when our friends from other Judiciaries will join us for three main events:
 - (a) First, a major international conference on the Rule of Law, highlighting its continued centrality to Singapore’s story. The SAL Annual Lecture will be integrated into the conference programme.

- (b) Second, a gala dinner at which we will launch the commemorative book.
 - (c) And, third, a formal sitting of the court on 27 November 2026, the very day of the Bicentennial.
13. Our Bicentennial year will also feature an important milestone in the physical development of our courts' infrastructure: the formation of a Judicial Precinct, comprising the Octagon, the State Courts Towers, and the building formerly occupied by the Family Justice Courts ("FJC"), which will be repurposed to house the Syariah Court and other related judicial institutions. This will facilitate the sharing of facilities and services and the joint development of ideas and best practices. In our Bicentennial year, this is an especially fitting and tangible tribute to the rule of law in Singapore, which as you, Mr Attorney, have observed, is the foundational principle of the Second Charter of Justice.
14. In marking the Bicentennial, we commemorate a moment of signal importance in Singapore's journey from humble beginnings within a colonial empire to a thriving city-state that shines as a standard-bearer for the rule of law and governance. We honour the devoted service of all who have made it their life's work to build our legal and judicial system into what it is today: an institution of excellence and integrity that all of us – every judge, every lawyer, every Singaporean – can be proud of and can call our own.

IV. THE FUTURE OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION

15. Beyond the festivities, the Bicentennial drives us to reflect on what lies ahead for the legal profession. At the second Legal Profession Symposium

("Symposium") that was held last year, the profession gathered for candid discussions on the challenges it faces and on how we might develop a shared vision that will resonate across generational lines.¹ We confronted issues that had no easy answers. But I am encouraged by the clear consensus that we all arrived at – which is that more must be done, and that we must act *now*.

16. One key challenge is something that, Professor Tan, you touched on, which is attrition, driven by fundamental shifts in legal practice. The digital age has expanded cross-border interactions, removed limits on document processing and production,² and increased the pace of engagements, with clients demanding higher quality work and ever more responsive lawyers.³ This has generated new pressures, pushing law firms to become increasingly focused on revenues. The growing complexity and cost of dispute resolution have also reduced the opportunities for young advocates to develop their craft, which can be demoralising.⁴
17. On the other hand, young lawyers enjoy a proliferation of career opportunities, including in-house and non-legal roles. In surveys that were conducted at the inaugural Mass Admissions Ceremony in 2025 and the Mass Call in 2024, around 60% of respondents indicated that they were likely to leave legal practice within the next five years.⁵ This is consistent with data from the SAL which suggests that a growing number of lawyers of two to four years' post-

¹ Sundaresh Menon CJ, "The Future of the Legal Profession: A Shared Vision", Singapore Academy of Law Journal (published on e-First 3 September 2025) ("Future of the Legal Profession") at para 3: <accessed at <https://journalsonline.academypublishing.org.sg/Journals/Singapore-Academy-of-Law-Journal/e-First/ctl/eFirstPDFPage/mid/519/ArticleId/2566?Citation=Published+on+e-First+3+September+2025>>.

² Sundaresh Menon CJ, "The Complexification of Disputes in the Digital Age" (Goff Lecture 2021) at paras 16 and 20.

³ Future of the Legal Profession at para 21.

⁴ Future of the Legal Profession at para 24.

⁵ Future of the Legal Profession at para 31.

qualification experience are moving to in-house roles.⁶ As you have observed, while this is not inherently problematic, it would be cause for concern if it was reflective of a growing perception among young lawyers that legal practice is no longer a viable or desirable long-term career option. If we do not retain lawyers who are willing to stay the course, this will impact the future of our profession.

18. The profession is also affected by the emerging ubiquity of Generative AI (“Gen AI”), which challenges us to rethink the core function of a lawyer and the nature of legal work. Mr Attorney, you spoke about how your chambers have been using artificial intelligence (“AI”) and other technology tools, while recognising that core values and uniquely human skills cannot be replaced. And, Professor Tan, you expressed concern that technology will impact the type of work that lawyers, particularly junior lawyers, will continue doing. As we discussed during the Symposium, Gen AI *will* upend the practice of law and the way we train and develop lawyers. At the same time, ensuring that our profession is ready to harness new technology responsibly will improve the public’s access to justice.
19. These and other such issues affect all of us, and we must act collectively to address them. At the Symposium, I proposed a public-private partnership, with some broad workstreams to help us move in a more sustainable direction.
20. First, we must transform our approach to the education and training of new lawyers, and to continuing legal education:

⁶ Future of the Legal Profession at para 36.

- (a) For new lawyers, we must instil in them an appreciation of what legal practice is about: that it is a *craft* that calls for discipline, hard work, stamina and staying power. As you observed, Mr Attorney, a willingness to develop these qualities remains central to one's development as an effective lawyer. At the same time, we need to revamp the education of young lawyers to make it fit for an era defined by technology and Gen AI. The profession must clearly articulate the new realities of practice to our law schools and work with them to ensure that their curricula are practical and future-ready.
 - (b) For those already in the profession, we must reimagine our approach to Continuing Legal Education by curating programmes that are meaningful, practical and effective. This should include, as you have mentioned, Professor Tan, broadening lawyers' understanding of allied disciplines. But this is, at best, part of the solution. Lawyers on their part cannot view attendance at these programmes as merely a formal requirement, but must appreciate that continuing education is essential for professional development in a rapidly evolving environment.
21. Second, we must recognise the potential implications of AI. Of course, there will be a role for lawyers in a world defined by AI, perhaps even a greater role than before. While AI will power a widening range of tools capable of assisting practitioners, we must recognise and guard against the potential accompanying risks, including the real possibility that AI will affect or even compromise the development of foundational skills such as legal research, analysis, drafting, and reasoning. As AI increasingly displaces the

opportunities for lawyers to develop these skills, we should expect skills degradation to take place, which may even impact our ability to check the accuracy of AI-generated work product. Hence, our focus should be on how to ensure that lawyers can manage, harness and remain in control of AI, and maximise the benefits that it promises.

22. Third, we must take the issue of mental wellness seriously and in the right spirit. We must not trivialise the challenges faced by young lawyers or view their stress as a sign of fragility. Our younger colleagues inhabit a radically more complex and fast-moving environment than before. They are typically at the receiving end of demands for constant connectivity and quick responses, notwithstanding the greater complexity of legal work. And with a significant degree of remote working still practised in many firms, the degree and quality of human interactions have diminished, limiting the opportunities for mentorship and support.
23. Fourth, we must constantly survey opportunities beyond our shores. As you have mentioned, Professor Tan, there is untapped potential for our lawyers to expand abroad. Singapore lawyers and law firms must look to ASEAN and the rest of Asia, and even to the Middle East and Africa, which remain vibrant growth markets in which our practitioners enjoy excellent reputations. This will help law firms thrive in a competitive landscape while also enhancing the enthusiasm of our younger lawyers for legal practice.
24. The SAL has taken several important first steps towards the implementation of these workstreams. To outline just some of the work being done:

- (a) To support Continuing Legal Education efforts, the SAL has updated the Legal Industry Framework for Training and Education (“LIFTED”), which defines competencies and pathways for legal work. The framework for disputes and corporate lawyers, which I announced at the Opening of the last Legal Year, was introduced in May, and a similar framework for in-house counsel was launched in October in collaboration with the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association. Moving forward, LIFTED will be expanded to allied legal professionals. SAL will also introduce an accreditation scheme for training providers and launch a training roadmap in the first half of this year to help legal professionals identify competency gaps and select appropriate courses.
- (b) To help lawyers navigate the broad range of career opportunities before them, the SAL has launched a career coaching programme with legally trained coaches. This year, SAL will supplement this with an AI-powered app that will serve as a career coach, suggesting developmental plans.⁷ I encourage its use in conjunction with the in-person career coaching programme.
- (c) To strengthen AI fluency within the profession, the SAL will partner with the Infocomm Media Development Authority to equip practitioners to use AI effectively and responsibly. Further details will be provided in the first half of this year.

⁷ SAL, “Speech by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon at the SAL Annual Appreciation Dinner 2025” at para 9 <accessed at <https://sal.org.sg/articles/speech-by-chief-justice-sundaresh-menon-at-sal-annual-appreciation-dinner-2025/>>.

- (d) Finally, AI has been integrated within LawNet 4.0, which was launched last year featuring a redesigned research experience that enables practitioners to pose research questions in natural language and obtain a summary of the relevant points with links to primary sources. Upcoming enhancements will direct users to judgments and textbooks referencing specific statutory provisions. To support lawyers venturing abroad and corporate counsel with regional responsibilities, LawNet will introduce a podcast series, which will feature experts sharing perspectives on navigating legal, regulatory and cultural complexities when operating across Asia.
25. Still with an eye to developing our young lawyers, we will enhance the Young Independent Counsel Scheme to increase opportunities for young advocates to hone their advocacy skills while assisting the court on important or complex issues of law. The scheme, which currently applies to cases before the General Division of the High Court, will be extended to suitable cases before the Court of Appeal and the Appellate Division of the High Court.
26. On the part of our law schools, enhancements are being made to their curricula to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a radically different world. The curricula will include expanded coverage of civil law, legal issues concerning emerging industries such as AI, and related skills such as accounting and finance; but, as I have already noted, there should be more dialogue between our law schools and the profession and we will facilitate this. For practising lawyers, we will curate expanded course options, some of which may be available at no cost on the education portal of

the Singapore Institute of Legal Education, to ensure that we maximise the benefits of the enhanced 16-point requirement in Continuing Professional Development that took effect last year.

27. These are helpful first steps. I encourage the profession to embrace these initiatives and to explore other solutions. But let me emphasise that the profession will not have to do this alone. The Minister for Law and I have discussed these matters on a number of occasions, and we are very much aligned in our view that we must help our profession to meet these challenges. To this end, we will together co-lead in setting the direction for the Future of the Legal Profession committee, with representatives from the Judiciary, the Attorney-General's Chambers, the Ministry of Law, the SAL, the Law Society, the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association and the academia. The Minister and I are deeply committed to this endeavour, and we will strongly support the work of this committee. This is the public-private partnership that I spoke of, and it will be the key to addressing this multifaceted challenge. I encourage the profession to support and participate in the initiatives that are planned.

V. FAMILY JUSTICE

28. Just as the profession must redesign its practices to future-proof itself, so too will the Judiciary refine its models to keep pace with changing justice needs. I illustrate this first with our work in family justice.

29. I have previously spoken on the centrality of Therapeutic Justice (“TJ”) in our family justice landscape.⁸ TJ offers a constructive way forward for the parties by focusing on addressing the human difficulties that typically underlie the legal issues, and it affords the parties a platform to work together to resolve their issues.
30. TJ has been given practical expression in the TJ Model which was launched at the FJC’s 10th anniversary celebrations in October 2024. Since March 2025, all cases with contested child issues that proceed to hearing, as well as those that do not involve children but are nonetheless highly contentious, have been managed by multi-disciplinary teams, each comprising a mediation judge, a hearing judge and a Court Family Specialist.
31. We have since extended TJ principles to proceedings in the Youth Court, and developed enhanced therapeutic interventions and preventive measures through collaborations with stakeholders. A notable new initiative is the School Re-integration Network, which was launched in August 2025 in partnership with the Ministry of Education. The School Re-integration Network facilitates the reintegration into a school setting of young persons who have been persistently absent from school.
32. Our development of the TJ Model has sparked interest beyond our shores. TJ will serve as the central theme for discussions at the 4th ASEAN Family Judges Forum in 2026. This is especially timely because where there are

⁸ Sundaresh Menon CJ, “The Family Justice Courts: Building on Firm Foundations” (23 July 2025) at para 6.

cross-border divorces involving children, international cooperation on TJ lines and practices will be beneficial.

33. These developments have created a corresponding need for the specialised training of family law practitioners. At last year's Opening of the Legal Year, I announced the establishment of a sub-committee to develop a specialist accreditation framework for family law practitioners.⁹ The sub-committee has since recommended such a framework that will recognise the essential role of family law practitioners and their vital contributions to family justice in Singapore. This will enhance professional excellence in family law and encourage the development of a corps of family lawyers with both the head and the heart to help families rebuild their lives. Applications for accreditation are planned to open from the first quarter of 2026.

VI. COMMUNITY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

34. In the area of community justice, the Small Claims Tribunals ("SCTs") are at the cutting edge of our access-to-justice efforts. The SCTs have pioneered the use of Gen AI to help its users, who are mostly self-represented persons ("SRPs"). Since 2023, the SCTs have collaborated with Harvey.AI to explore the implementation of Gen AI-powered services. The first phase, between late 2024 and March 2025, enabled on-demand translations of court documents using any of our official languages. The second phase, launched in the last quarter of 2025, made case summarisation capabilities available to Tribunal Magistrates, and this was subsequently extended to the parties. These

⁹ Sundaresh Menon CJ, Response delivered at the Opening of the Legal Year (13 January 2025) at para 37(b).

developments reflect our broader philosophy of leveraging technology in a measured way to enhance access to justice. We will explore further areas for such collaboration.

35. Turning to criminal justice, the Legal Assistance Scheme for Capital Offences (“LASCO”) offers free legal counsel for accused persons facing capital charges. Those who serve on LASCO do so voluntarily and they play a crucial role in ensuring that accused persons in capital cases receive a fair trial.
36. The LASCO appointment process and eligibility criteria were last reviewed about five years ago. It is therefore timely for a fresh review. I have asked the Supreme Court Registry, which administers the LASCO scheme, to undertake that review. This will ensure that LASCO continues to attract and empanel capable counsel who will provide sound legal representation.

VII. ACCESS TO JUSTICE

37. On the same theme, the Access to Justice Programme Office has made so much headway since its establishment in 2023 that it is now a full division of the Judiciary. The office has completed 40 projects to enhance the accessibility of our court services, and these are benefitting around 4,000 court users each month.
38. Over the past year, the Division has taken steps to enhance the ability of SRPs to participate more effectively in court processes. This included the launch of a user-friendly guide on the SG Courts website consolidating the

rules for the preparation of trial bundles, and an animated video series to guide SRPs through the different stages of civil trials.

VIII. TRAINING OF JUDGES

39. I turn next to an area of vital importance – the training and development of our judges. The Singapore Judicial College (“SJC”) has continued to enhance its competency-based programmes to equip judges with core judicial skills and knowledge. To augment its teaching faculty, the SJC collaborated with 85 experts last year. These included distinguished jurists such as the retired Canadian Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Abella and our newest International Judge, Justice David Goddard.
40. The SJC also made valuable contributions to the broader mission of building an international community of judicial learners. In 2025, it ran two flagship international programmes. The first was its Judicial Executive Programme, which featured world-class faculty from Singapore and from partner judiciaries and institutions. The Programme equips participants to undertake meaningful judicial reform in a volatile and uncertain environment. The second was the inaugural SICC-SJC Commercial Law Series, which focused on international arbitration. This was attended by 29 Judges from 16 jurisdictions.
41. The SJC has also commenced a study into the judicial well-being of our Judges and judicial officers. Discussions around factors that may affect judicial well-being are now an integral part of judicial education. The SJC has launched a judiciary-wide study to gain insight into these factors, and the

strategies that we develop will safeguard and further enhance public trust and confidence in our justice system.

IX. SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL COURT

42. I turn to international developments, beginning with the Singapore International Commercial Court (“SICC”). Last year, we marked the SICC’s 10th anniversary with a public conference, which was attended by more than 430 participants from all over the world. At the conference dinner, Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong delivered an important address highlighting the role of the SICC in supporting the international rule of law by resolving complex cross-border commercial disputes. Later in the year, we launched a commemorative publication titled “Charting New Waters: The Singapore International Commercial Court After Ten Years”, which featured essays on the pioneering work of the SICC by leading jurists, including several of our Judges and International Judges.
43. To carry this momentum forward, we will hold a SICC Seminar titled “From Mareva to Metaverse” tomorrow afternoon for members of the profession. The Seminar is co-organised by the SICC and the SAL and will focus on interim injunctions in cross-border commercial disputes.
44. Beyond our shores, the official launch of the Bahrain International Commercial Court (“BICC”) in November 2025 was the culmination of two years of close collaboration with Bahrain’s Council for International Dispute Resolution on matters such as the establishment of the BICC’s Advisory

Panel, the empanelment of the BICC bench, the implementation of a legislative framework, and the training of the court staff.

45. The establishment of the BICC underscores the growing significance of international commercial courts in transnational commercial justice. The law serves as a global currency of trust that gives commercial parties the confidence to transact across national and cultural borders. To achieve this, the law must feature coherence and consistency across borders.¹⁰
46. This is where international commercial courts play a key role. These courts can be potent drivers of legal convergence by providing neutral fora that apply broadly convergent principles to address emerging issues. By efficiently disposing of complex cross-jurisdictional disputes and publishing reasoned decisions, they contribute significantly to the development of the modern *lex mercatoria*. Further, by fashioning transnational procedural norms that discourage forum shopping and abusive re-litigation,¹¹ they help drive convergence in the procedural architecture of international litigation and play a key role in supporting international commerce.
47. The establishment of the BICC signals our commitment to building such hub or nodal courts in regions such as Asia, the Middle East and Africa. A unique feature of the BICC is that parties can bring appeals from the BICC to the International Committee of the SICC. This transnational appellate mechanism will, over the medium term, funnel a diverse range of commercial cases to the

¹⁰ Sundaresh Menon CJ, "International Commercial Courts as Catalysts of Legal Convergence" (6 November 2025) ("BICC Welcome Remarks") at para 4.

¹¹ BICC Welcome Remarks at para 9.

International Committee, allowing it to adopt a systemic perspective in developing transnational commercial law ¹² and aligning commercial jurisprudence in these important regions.

48. We look forward to contributing further to the BICC's development and to partnering with Bahrain in building an institution that will catalyse legal development and support the resolution of commercial disputes in the Middle East and North Africa.

X. INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION

49. Beyond our work in Bahrain, we have deepened our relationships with our counterparts abroad, with a record number of international engagements. Last year, these included bilateral exchanges with the Supreme Courts of Korea, New Zealand and China on issues ranging from judicial education to AI and climate change disputes, as well as inaugural roundtables between the SICC and the London Commercial Court and the Tokyo Business Court covering important issues of common interest in commercial law. Such partnerships strengthen the international rules-based order which is in need of strengthening and which is an existential necessity for a small nation like ours. Through Memoranda of Understanding, we have also committed to deepening our ties with the judiciaries of Mongolia and of the Philippines. In addition, we have engaged other judiciaries through multilateral platforms such as the International Hague Network of Judges, the inaugural Hague Conference on Private International Law with ASEAN Judiciaries, the Judicial

¹² BICC Welcome Remarks at para 20.

Insolvency Network, the Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts, and the J20 Summit.

50. Last November, we also had the privilege of hosting the 46th ASEAN Law Association (“ALA”) Governing Council Meeting and the 12th Meeting of the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (“CACJ”). These gatherings brought together a significant number of delegates from across the ASEAN legal community, including Chief Justices, senior judges, practitioners, in-house counsel and academics. The meetings were notable because we sought to harness the synergies between the ALA and the CACJ – as two institutions committed to strengthening the rule of law in ASEAN – through a series of carefully curated events.
51. For the first time, the programme included joint seminars that featured judges and practitioners together on cross-border insolvency, dispute resolution, and transnational legal practice in ASEAN. We also held inaugural meetings involving specialist ASEAN judges and practitioners to discuss frameworks to better manage cross-border insolvency and the impact of Gen AI on intellectual property.
52. Looking ahead, the ALA has commenced a project to review its vision and structure to ensure that the legal profession plays an important role in ASEAN's development. That project is led by our colleague, Senior Judge Lee Seiu Kin. And, as the CACJ expands its scope and influence, it will work closely with practitioners to ensure that its initiatives advance the rule of law across ASEAN. These are also significant developments in the light of what I

have said about the importance of our professionals venturing beyond Singapore.

XI. APPOINTMENT OF SENIOR COUNSEL

53. I come to the appointment of Senior Counsel. This year, we appoint as Senior Counsel, Mr Danny Ong Tun Wei.

54. It is a privilege to be admitted to the profession's most senior ranks and it comes with a solemn responsibility to set the standard for excellence as advocates and as leaders of our profession. I congratulate Mr Ong.

XII. CONCLUSION

55. As we stand at the cusp of a new century in the history of our courts and legal system, we can look to the future with anticipation, excitement and optimism. Two hundred years ago, the Second Charter of Justice laid the foundations of our legal and judicial system. From those modest beginnings in 1826, we have built institutions and platforms that today serve not only Singapore but contribute meaningfully to the global architecture of justice. You observed, Professor Tan, that we have built a system that is widely respected internationally. A few weeks ago, when I was working on this Response, my attention was drawn to an article in the New York Times which identified our judiciary as one of just five in the world, alongside those of Norway, Denmark, Switzerland and Kuwait, which enjoyed public confidence levels of 85% or more.¹³ That affirms the sense that we have exceptionally good reason for

¹³ Adam Liptak, "Confidence in US Courts Plummets to Rate Far Below Peer Nations" (*New York Times*, 17 December 2024).

celebrating the Bicentennial. Our journey from a colonial outpost to a leading international dispute resolution hub, with a judiciary that is cherished as a national institution, is a testament to our unwavering belief in the law's foundational importance to our nation-building enterprise, and our bold vision that our laws and legal institutions can become a cornerstone of regional and international commerce. And it did not happen by accident. It was the result of the intentional efforts of so many stakeholders over the decades.

56. As we come together to celebrate our Bicentennial year, it is my ardent hope that we will all look back over the great distance we have successfully travelled in order to draw strength, encouragement and the conviction that together, we *will* rise to meet the challenges that lie ahead, even as dark clouds appear to be gathering and casting shadows over the geopolitical order that we have enjoyed for over 80 years, and that we will build even stronger institutions to serve our people, our nation, and our wider region.
57. Thank you very much, and I wish you all a happy, healthy and fulfilling year ahead.