

Remarks by Mr Ho Kwon Ping

SMU Chairman

At SMU Commencement 2017 Opening Ceremony

School of Law Building, Tuesday 11 July 2017

Guest of Honour, Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Law and Home Affairs;
Mr J Y Pillay, Chancellor of SMU;
Mr Lim Chee Onn, Pro-Chancellor of SMU;
Members of the Board of Trustees;
Friends of SMU and invited guests;
Members of the faculty and staff of SMU;
Graduates of the Class of 2017 together with your family and friends;
Good afternoon.

Welcome to SMU's 14th Commencement Ceremony and congratulations to the 7th cohort of graduands from the School of Law.

You are starting your careers at a time of great change in the work landscape with the disruptive influence of artificial intelligence and automation. Highly complex but routinised work will eventually be replaced in virtually every profession, from accountancy, to engineering and medicine.

This will affect lawyers too. Just as fintech is starting to affect the work of thousands of financial analysts, legal research will be conducted by sophisticated search engines and artificial intelligence algorithms, leaving only

the most creative, adaptive, and forward-thinking legal minds with some borrowed time, to create an irreplaceable uniqueness about their own abilities.

Though no profession will be completely safe from disruptive change, you do have what others have called the “SMU advantage”. These are the attributes of self-agency, creative problem-solving, and innovative thinking which have for 17 years been the hallmark of the SMU pedagogy.

Although this graduating cohort did not have the opportunity to enjoy the unique opportunities for learning which this impressive School of Law building embodies, let me entice you to return as a graduate student, to enjoy a bit of what we have to offer:

The Kwa Geok Choo Law Library is a state-of-the-art repository of legal knowledge and is linked not only to all the world’s top online resources, but also with the legal fraternity in Singapore.

The David Marshall Moot Court will develop the power of disciplined yet agile thinking and clear yet eloquent articulation which represents SMU’s interactive pedagogy. Some of you may already have been part of our many teams which have shone on the world stage of moot courts and there will be more opportunities at the graduate level to hone your advocacy skills.

The Pro Bono Centre continues the social awareness and heart skills you developed through community service, by putting your specific professional skills to good use.

The flexible study spaces throughout the building, the panoramic views from the upper floors and of course the easy access to the historic sites and natural beauty of Fort Canning Park means lots of opportunities to linger after class and more seriously engage in romantic pursuits than you did as a teenager. And of course, when you finally find your life partner in SMU as a graduate student, this stunning multi-function hall is perfect for your wedding banquet – at a fraction of the price of neighbouring hotels!

More seriously, we hope you will return often to the Law School after you graduate, either as a committed alumnus, or to continue with further degree or executive education classes, or as a mentor to new undergraduates. SMU has been your home for a very important, transformational four years of your life, and you will always remain an important stakeholder in the SMU community, which is ever-growing, changing, and maturing.

It is fitting that for the first commencement ceremony in the new School of Law building, we are able today to welcome as our Guest of Honour Singapore's Minister for Law and Minister for Home Affairs Mr K Shanmugam.

Mr Shanmugam was educated at Raffles Institution and graduated at the top of his class with First Class Honours from NUS in 1984, before being admitted to the Bar as an advocate and solicitor.

He then went into private practice and became a senior partner and head of Litigation & Dispute Resolution at Allen & Gledhill LLP, which was the largest law firm in Singapore. He was consistently recognised in various international publications as one of the top litigation, arbitration and insolvency Counsel in Asia and Singapore.

In 1998, he was appointed a Senior Counsel of the Supreme Court of Singapore at 38, one of the youngest lawyers to be so appointed.

Mr Shanmugam became an MP when he was elected in Sembawang GRC in 1988. He is an adviser to several grassroots and community organisations in Nee Soon GRC, is an elected member of the Nee Soon Town Council, and an adviser to the North West Community Development Council.

On 1 May 2008, Mr Shanmugam was appointed to the Cabinet. As I mentioned, he is now the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Law; and he has also served as the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

To the Class of 2017, wherever your future career leads you – whether it is as a family solicitor, corporate lawyer, or future Minister for Law – remember you are someone whom Singapore needs for its continued peace, harmony and prosperity.

At SMU, you have received the knowledge, skills and values for a successful career. Now you begin a new journey, and I hope that your years here and in the future, has and will help you in that most important task in life: to find purpose and meaning in everything that you do.

Congratulations again.

- End -