



**Welcome Address by
Professor Lily Kong, SMU Provost,
at the official launch of the SMU Pro Bono Centre's new premises
at the SMU School of Law Building
on Friday, 6 October 2017**

Mr Chan Sek Keong, former Chief Justice and current Senior Judge of the Singapore Supreme Court and Advisor to the SMU Pro Bono Centre;

Mr Tan Chong Huat, Chairman of the RHT Rajan Menon Foundation and Senior Partner, RHTLaw Taylor Wessing LLP;

Members of the RHT Rajan Menon Foundation Board;

Mr V.K. Rajah, Chairman of the SMU School of Law Advisory Board;

Members of the SMU School of Law Advisory Board;

Faculty, staff, students and friends of SMU;

A very good afternoon to all of you. It gives me great pleasure and privilege to welcome everyone to the official launch of the SMU Pro Bono Centre's new premises at the SMU School of Law.

In very many ways, I am extremely humbled with regards to today's proceedings.

Let me begin by acknowledging the generosity of our donor, RHT Rajan Menon Foundation, for their gift of S\$300,000, which will go into supporting the Pro Bono Centre for a period of five years commencing this academic year 2017. SMU is thrilled to be a part of this very meaningful partnership together with the Foundation. Inspired by the Foundation's mission to play its part as a good corporate citizen, advocating a culture of social responsibility, the gift will help to enable our law students to develop as more socially responsible individuals.

This is fully in line with our University's DNA. From inception, all our students have had to complete, as a graduating requirement, 80 hours of community service, enabled by our Centre for Social Responsibility (or C4SR). We did so because we believe that it is a firm reminder to students that the privilege of higher education comes with responsibilities –

including responsibility for those less fortunate than they (and we) are. Our secondary schools also mandate community service, and I am aware that there is some skepticism about whether students pay any real attention to their actions, or simply go through the motions. At SMU, I have been very heartened by what our data tells us. Whereas the University mandates 80 hours of service, the average number of hours completed has gone far beyond that. On average, each SMU student has completed 133 hours. Beyond the hours, we have developed a framework that helps our students reflect on their myriad activities, to make sense of self, of self in a team, and self in the larger community. Styled “LifeLessons”, our students are guided through pre- and post-activity reflections and discussions by our staff as co-educators. In this manner, we hope to help our students grow as trusted leaders and responsible global citizens

Together with our curricular and pedagogical innovations, our co-curricular education places SMU as a global frontrunner among research-intensive universities in the attention and commitment to high quality undergraduate education. We are deeply committed to creating positive change and instilling in our students the belief that they can meaningfully impact the world and be a source of pride for our community.

For our law students, in addition to the community service they can undertake with the guidance of C4SR as I’ve just described, they have the option of involving themselves in work at the Pro Bono Centre. I would like to commend Assoc Prof Rathna Koman, who took the reins from 2013 when the Centre was established (albeit without its own dedicated premises). She put together a structured programme which has nurtured in our students a strong commitment to pro bono work and enabled their learning and service. By involving students in regular legal clinic work at the Centre, which serves indigent members of the community, students have honed client interviewing skills and how to manage legal clinics, exposing them to legal aid work, and enabling them to integrate academic work with real-life experience. At the regional level, the Centre also collaborates with Asian universities, such as through internships, to raise pro bono consciousness among students.

I’m pleased to see that we have among us today SMU Law alumni, Mr Wilbur Lim and Mr Mark Lee, who, in their own practice, set out not only to provide quality legal service, but also

place great emphasis on giving back to the community through pro bono or corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Similarly, our emcee for today's event, Ms Niranjanna Ram, currently a Year 3 School of Law undergraduate, had already completed nearly 120 hours of Pro Bono hours (and counting) at the Centre by the time she completed her second year of study.

I am confident that with this new partnership with RHT Rajan Menon Foundation and the wisdom of Mr Chan Sek Keong as Advisor to the Centre, we will see more students devoting more good to pro bono work. Through this, we can be confident that our students will gain a greater understanding of the needs of our society and the less privileged, that there will be more meaningful programmes in place to serve the community, and last but certainly not least, a cultivation in our young lawyers of a sense of service – of what it means to give without expecting anything in return.

To the Law students here today – I thank you for getting involved in pro bono work – and assure you that it will only reap benefits throughout your life and legal career.

To our generous supporters, RHT Rajan Menon Foundation – I am humbled by your sincere approach to the School of Law, to our students, and the meaningful efforts that will be put in place as a result of your commitment to the Pro Bono Centre.

To our Advisor, Mr Chan Sek Keong – thank you for supporting the Centre with your guidance. I am sure I speak for everyone here that your wealth of knowledge and experience will make a magnificent impact on the School, the students and the community. Throughout Mr Chan's illustrious career, he has advocated passionately for our lawyers to be more actively involved in pro bono work, thereby improving access to justice for the less fortunate, and he continues to champion this cause. So thank you, and welcome all to the SMU family!

Thank you.

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