

Teach young about S'pore Constitution, says law prof

Toh Yong Chuan

More can be done to educate students on Singapore's Constitution, a law professor suggested at a Workers' Party (WP) forum yesterday.

And it can start as early as in primary school, said Singapore Management University's assistant professor of law Jack Lee Tsen-Ta. An understanding of the Constitution can help Singaporeans be better citizens and remind them that they need to respect the Government, he explained.

"I've often thought about writing a children's book on the Constitution," he said.

Prof Lee's suggestion was one of several floated at the event organised by WP's Youth Wing, as part of a forum series called YouthQuake.

About 25 people, mostly in their 20s, turned up to listen to Prof Lee, WP chairman Sylvia Lim and corporate lawyer Koh Jie Kai talk about the importance of constitutional rights to young people.

Ms Lim, a former law lecturer at Temasek Polytechnic, highlighted some weaknesses in Singapore's constitutional and criminal law that she felt could be addressed. For example, people arrested were not told of their rights at the point of arrest – called a Miranda warning – and the law did not set a time limit after which a person being investigated for a crime was allowed to see a lawyer.

She also called for improvements to be made in the areas of legal aid and access to counsel.

Both Prof Lee and Mr Koh also gave their audience a run-down of Singapore's constitutional laws and compared them with those of other countries.

The question-and-answer session that followed their talks appeared to reinforce Prof Lee's observation that public understanding of the Constitution could be improved.

About half the 10 questions raised were seeking clarifications on issues such as protection from gender discrimination, casino bans and international treaties signed by Singapore, and how these related to the Constitution.

Speaking to reporters later, Ms Lim said the forum was organised to get a sense of how young people feel about constitutional issues.

Asked whether WP would bring these issues up in Parliament, she would only say: "The views... have to be further discussed. We'll look at the agenda we intend to canvass later on."