

SMU Commencement 2013

Honorary Degree Citation

Chan Sek Keong

The Singapore Management University confers an Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) degree upon Dr Chan Sek Keong in recognition of his remarkable contributions to the development of the legal sector in Singapore, as Attorney-General and subsequently as Chief Justice.

Dr Chan has always been a pioneer, achieving several firsts. He was among the inaugural batch of law graduates from the University of Malaya in 1961 and he was the first Singapore law graduate to be admitted to the Federal Bar of Malaya in 1962.

He was the first person to be appointed Judicial Commissioner in 1986, amongst the first to be appointed Senior Counsel in 1997, and the first person to have held consecutive appointments as Judicial Commissioner, Judge, Attorney-General and Chief Justice. Chief Justice Chan became the first Singaporean and local law graduate to become an Honorary Bencher of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, England, in 2008. Then in 2009, he was the first Asian to receive the International Jurists Award for outstanding contributions to the administration of justice and enhancing the dignity of the judiciary in Asia.

Dr Chan was a practitioner when the Pan-Electric Industries company collapsed in 1985 due to unsettled forward contracts. It was the largest corporate collapse in Singapore's history and forced the stock exchanges of both Singapore and Malaysia to shut down for three days. Dr Chan was called upon to draft agreements to extend credit from banks to the insolvent stockbroking firms. These skilfully crafted agreements restored liquidity to the system, ensured the survival of the Stock Exchange and helped Singapore to maintain its standing as a financial centre.

While serving as Chief Justice, Dr Chan was asked by the Government to appear as Counsel for Singapore in the International Court of Justice at The Hague in the Pedra Branca dispute. Together with Professor Jayakumar, Professor Tommy Koh and others, he presented Singapore's case lucidly and the ICJ decisively upheld Singapore's sovereignty over the island.

As Attorney-General, Dr Chan proved to be firm but fair, bold but humble. He earned the respect of the legal profession by remembering the importance of an independent Bar when advising the Government on legal policy and regulation. He also established the technological infrastructure for legal research and services and defined the country's strategic legal needs.

On his appointment as Chief Justice on 11 April 2006, he maintained an unrelenting determination to uphold the rule of law, to build respect for the integrity of law and to ensure a fair judicial process. He also tirelessly sought to promote co-operation amongst the Judiciary, the Bar, the Legal Service, as well as law academics. Chan Sek Keong's initiatives as Chief Justice were a significant factor in building a judicial system in Singapore that is equal to the very best in the world.