

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT, LEGAL SERVICE COMMISSION, CHIEF**  
**JUSTICE YONG PUNG HOW**  
**AT THE 1st SINGAPORE LEGAL SERVICE ANNUAL DINNER**

on Friday, 6 April 2001  
at the Ballroom, The Fullerton

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen

My wife and I are very happy to be able to join you all for this first Annual Dinner of the Singapore Legal Service.

2. Tonight's event is a formal dinner. It is not common in Singapore for professional bodies or societies to hold formal dinners. Most annual dinners are recreational affairs intended to promote camaraderie and cheer among their members. A formal dinner has a very different meaning for professionals. It is a more solemn occasion where the members gather as an identifiable and distinct body of men and women in order to focus on their roles, identify themselves and each other as members of their profession, and mutually reinforce their professional objectives and their identity. Thus tonight, the officers of the Singapore Legal Service gather together, for the first time on such an occasion, to remind ourselves, and each other, of the fact that we are an important body of men and women who have a common mission, one that entails grave responsibilities in the way Singapore is governed and in the well-being of its people.

3. Foremost among the changes introduced, which I believe that all of you would be keenly aware of, are the enhancements which have been made to the scheme of remuneration of the Service. Legal Service emoluments are now very competitive and match those of the leading law firms in Singapore. The Service now offers to all officers ranges of monetary remuneration which are above the average for their respective cohorts. A commitment has also been made that this will always continue to be the case. If the leading law firms increase the remuneration for the lawyers employed by them, the Legal Service will not be slow to match them. In this sense, Legal Service emoluments are now marketdriven in that our salary scales are now benchmarked against the income of practising lawyers in the private sector. This also means that should the market dictate that Legal Service salaries are above what is economically sustainable, appropriate adjustments will have to be made. With the changes made in this area, I believe that remuneration should no longer be a factor for Legal Service Officers to consider when deciding on the future direction of their professional lives.

4. Another visible change introduced was the establishment of the Legal Service Management Office. A new post of Chief of Staff of the Singapore Legal Service has been created. The LSMO is now undertaking the role of the Secretariat of the Legal Service Commission as well as the Special Personnel Board and the Senior Personnel Board. The LSMO is focused on the Legal Service and is in a position to give close

attention to the career development of every single Legal Service Officer. It will strive to ensure that every officer is developed to his highest potential so that he or she can contribute to the Service at the most optimum level. It also has the brief of ensuring that the Service is adequately staffed with good officers and that all officers are fairly remunerated according to market norms. The Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff are both Legal Service officers. This means that, for the first time, the Legal Service as a whole, and the professional development of every officer in the Service, is managed by Legal Service Officers.

5. With these changes, the Legal Service has moved much closer in terms of structure and standing to the Administrative Service. Administrative Service Officers are regarded by the Government as the key public officers in the administration of Singapore. They assist in the formulation and direct the implementation of crucial Government policies. The Administrative Service has a special unit in the Public Service Division to manage the affairs of the Service and of Administrative Service officers. This unit provided the model for the Legal Service Management Office.

6. It would therefore not be wrong to say that these and the other changes that have been introduced is a recognition by the Government of the crucial constitutional and statutory roles which Legal Service officers have in the affairs of our nation and the lives of our people.

7. We all know and can see the dramatic progress which Singapore has achieved in the short span of 40-odd years. We have come from an undeveloped nation mired in poverty, disease and ignorance to among the richest nations of the world. Even more dramatic is our social development. From a raffish crimeridden society with high rates of illiteracy, we have now developed into a sophisticated urban society. Our educational system produces children who consistently top the world in science and mathematics and our living environment has proved to be a major attraction for talents the world over to come to live here and contribute to our economic development.

8. Much has been said about the role of a strong, stable and incorruptible government in bringing these about. But what is often not mentioned is the role of the Law in the achievements of Singapore. Singapore is a nation which is based wholly on the Rule of Law. It is clear and practical laws and the effective observance and enforcement of these laws which provide the foundation for our economic and social development. It is the certainty which an environment based on the Rule of Law generates which gives our people, as well as many MNCs and other foreign investors, the confidence to invest in our physical, industrial as well as social infrastructure. These are the fundamental bases of our economic growth and our social development.

9. It is the responsibility of us all here to maintain and develop the legal infrastructure of Singapore and uphold the Rule of Law. This is the main reason why we have a Legal Service which encompasses in one body both the subordinate Judiciary as well as legal officers in the executive branches of the government. All branches of the Legal Service work as one to achieve these goals. Officers in the Legal Branch of the

Service are in effect judicial officers working in the executive departments of the Government to ensure that our laws are just and effective and are fairly and consistently applied. Judicial officers are legal officers working in the Judiciary, ensuring that our laws are developed and applied in the cases which come up before them in a manner consistent with the values of the nation as a whole. Wherever a Legal Service Officer may be posted, the enhancement of the Rule of Law and the administration of justice, together with the reinforcement of the public trust and confidence in the Judiciary and the legal system, must be the guiding principles in the conduct of his or her everyday work. This is one important reason for the policy of posting officers from one branch of the Service to another, and for postings within each branch.

10. It would not be wrong to say that the Legal Service has played a very important role in the success which Singapore has achieved as a nation. The work of many Legal Service Officers has contributed significantly to the recognition which our legal system has obtained as being among the best legal systems in the world. It is therefore only appropriate that the Singapore Legal Service is positioned as a premier service in the public sector of Singapore.

11. The recognition which the Legal Service has received carries with it grave responsibilities. There is great expectation by the Government and the public generally as to what the Legal Service can and will do. This means that the Legal Service must continuously examine its work, and examine itself, in order to identify areas where improvements can be made. The Legal Service must always maintain high standards, not only in its professional work but in the quality and the personal conduct of its officers. This means, among other things, that Legal Service Officers must always keep abreast of developments around them in all respects, whether these be changes in the law, technology, social and political issues or international developments. Legal Service officers cannot practice law and make decisions in a vacuum. Your work must always be relevant to the environment where you are working as otherwise not only will your work be irrelevant, the results of your work may well be counter-productive to the very objectives which we all seek to serve. More importantly perhaps, the Legal Service must strive to constantly improve the quality of our officers. This means recruiting the best available and identifying the best among those already in the Service for development as future leaders of the Service. It means that all officers must be motivated to constantly upgrade their legal and other skills through both formal and informal training programmes. It also means that officers who have difficulty in attaining the standards expected should receive all the help they require from their seniors and their peers to attain these standards or, if they still have difficulty, in identifying and making the best possible career choices for themselves.

12. A final note which I would add here is that for the Legal service to continue to maintain its status, it must constantly review its role and its working modalities to ensure its relevance. One thing which we all can be certain about is that nothing is for certain. The environment in which we all operate will continue to change and the expectations on all of us in future will very likely be very different from the expectations which are placed upon us now. It would be sad indeed if the Service is lulled into believing that it

has arrived in terms of recognition and rewards and that whatever it enjoys in these respects are its entitlements. All these must be earned and it is the responsibility of Legal Service Officers to ensure that everything which they enjoy as Legal Service Officers are justly deserved. In this respect, the leaders of the Service bear a special responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. I hope that the issues which I have raised are issues which you have thought about at some time or other. These are grave issues which affect the Service as a whole, in particular they affect the future directions which the Legal Service may take.

14. The Legal Service has done well up to this point in our history. The future which all of us can now see is fraught with excitement and challenges. Insofar as the legal issues of this Millennium are concerned, many Legal Service Officers here are already at the forefront among the persons in Singapore addressing these. Many more will be needed as we enter further into this brave new age.

15. I trust that all of you here are ready for the challenges ahead.  
May I wish you all an enjoyable evening.