

# JUDICIARY VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATION DINNER 2016

TUESDAY, 1 NOVEMBER 2016

## OPENING REMARKS

BY

**CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON**

1. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the inaugural Judiciary Volunteers Appreciation Dinner. This evening marks the first time we have come together to jointly recognise and extend our appreciation to volunteers who have made outstanding contributions by way of undertaking *pro bono* work in our three courts: the State Courts, the Family Justice Courts and the Supreme Court. Let me therefore begin my brief address this evening by saying, on behalf of all of us from the Judiciary, thank you very much for helping our users access justice!
2. The administration of justice is fundamental to the rule of law in any society. For this to be a reality, there must be an assurance of access to justice. Unfortunately, there are the disadvantaged in society who lack the means to pay for legal services that would allow them to access justice in a meaningful way. It is here that *pro bono* work bridges the gap. The provision of *pro bono* services is thus an essential element in making justice truly accessible.
3. More than three years ago, when I opened the Opening of the Legal Year for the first time as Chief Justice, I spoke of the vital responsibility carried by lawyers to ensure access to justice and I implored the members of this honourable

profession, as servants of the law, to take greater steps towards this cause.<sup>1</sup> I am deeply grateful that this call has not gone unheeded. To illustrate this, I refer to the fact that we have seen a 69% increase in the number of Outstanding Volunteer Award Winners from the State Courts in the last year alone.<sup>2</sup> This is a reflection of the ever increasing engagement by all of you in *pro bono* work.

4. This Joint Appreciation Dinner does not only recognise the efforts made by lawyers. The efforts of non-lawyers are equally vital to the administration of justice and the “Open Category” Awards exist to recognise and to commend the efforts of our non-lawyer volunteers. This also includes award winners who have provided invaluable services in the field of mediation and counselling.
5. And there is yet another group of people to whom we are truly grateful. Our volunteers have been able to give of themselves in the ways that they have only because of the encouragement and support of their families who have endured the loss of the time they would otherwise have had together. This too is a critical part of helping us to administer justice. And so, this evening, in a departure from past practice, the spouses or special guests of our various award winners have been invited to be a part of this evening’s celebrations.
6. While the Judiciary Volunteers Appreciation Dinner is an occasion to celebrate and to recognise the contributions of our volunteers to this worthwhile cause, it should also serve as a reminder that there is much more which needs to be done. While institutional advances, in the form of new and improved initiatives, will be

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<sup>1</sup> Opening of the Legal Year 2013, Response by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, at paras 24 and 38. Available at <<http://www.sal.org.sg/Lists/Speeches/Attachments/112/CJ%20OLY%20Welcome%20Reference.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from OPA: there were 103 winners for the Outstanding Volunteer Award in 2015 and 174 winners for the same category in 2016.

made to improve access to justice, the success of such initiatives will ultimately be determined by the enduring willingness of all our volunteers to contribute to the cause. I would therefore like to encourage everyone here to continue to work with us in striving to entrench this spirit of service in this critically important area.

7. Congratulations once again to our various award winners; thank you to all our volunteers; and I wish all of you a wonderful evening.