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**Mass Call Speech
The President of the Law Society of Singapore
23 August 2014**

May it please Your Honour, I speak on behalf of the Law Society to welcome the cohort of 2014 to the Singapore Bar.

I am sure today is an incredibly proud day for all our newly called lawyers and their loved ones gathered here. You will remember this day because this is your first court session as advocates & solicitors of the Supreme Court of Singapore and under unique circumstances too, with your loved ones by your side. The next time you don the gown in Court, it will probably be your client by your side. He might not be looking at you then with the same sense of admiration and pride with which the gaze of your loved ones is fixed on you today. Hopefully, his look at you will be one of confidence and of gratitude. Not of despair.

You have worked long and hard and persevered to get to where you are today. Yet as you survey this packed auditorium, one eye on the 429 colleagues joining the Profession today, the other on the 650 or so coming on next year, some anxiety might be setting in just you are setting out. We hear securing employment with law firms is difficult for some this year and we have just heard the Law Minister say that even securing training contracts will be difficult

for some next year. Some of you might be wondering whether the bright sunshine of optimism surrounding this Profession in recent years is finally giving way to dark clouds blowing our way.

Whilst I think there is basis for concern in light of the growing numbers in terms of lawyers here amidst possibly falling numbers in terms of economic growth, I should also say something of the fresh winds in our midst and the resilience that this profession has to offer.

First, the good news.

Friends, there is reason indeed to take heart. Singapore's leadership role in international dispute resolution that is a result of the excellent pioneering work of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre is now set to be augmented by the Singapore International Commercial Court and the Singapore International Mediation Centre. These two new and soon to be launched institutions will, together with the SIAC, provide a holistic approach to the resolution of huge and complex cross border disputes. The opportunities for our young lawyers for exposure to sophisticated, multi party and multi jurisdictional disputes, for working alongside and pitting skills against the best practitioners of the law in both common and civil law systems are greater now than ever before. In Singapore, the dispute resolution arena is developing at an unprecedented pace on an unprecedented scale.

Fresh and increased opportunities for our lawyers for regional and international exposure exist in transactional work too. We are the leading legal and financial services centre in ASEAN, and have access through this grouping alone to a market comprising about half a

billion people generating a combined economic output of US\$2.4 trillion in 2014, representing the third largest collective economic bloc in Asia, behind only China and Japan. There is no reason why the practice of a local lawyer should be limited only to the geographical, political or even the commercial borders of our tiny island state. The Singapore lawyer is in great demand, both in as well as outside of ASEAN, for his technical skills, his language abilities, his diligence and his reputation for honesty and integrity. In any event, the Law Society is closely monitoring the situation and is considering various initiatives to ensure that every graduate eligible for and who needs a training contract gets a training contract.

Now, the better news.

There is an inherent goodness about our profession that is greater than the gloom that threatens it. It is that aspect of the calling of the advocate and solicitor that prospers us, not necessarily by bulging our wallets but by enriching our souls. Ours truly is a noble profession. It is noble not just because we play a role in Court which is unique only to us or that we facilitate deals and help form companies that builds the economy. It is noble by large measure because of the work that many in our midst are doing to bring justice and equity within the reach of the weakest and poorest in our community.

This is commonly known as pro bono work, goodness shown in various forms which at its core is the offer of legal services without the expectation of financial or professional gain in return. Pro bono is special tonic to all. It helps train our focus on the sustaining essence of our calling: it makes us look less at self, more at others; less at gain, more at service, less at our stress, more at our satisfaction. It helps to build a sense of mission in the work that we

do and fortifies resilience in the work ethos within us. It makes what we do and the heavy loads we often carry as lawyers, all worthwhile.

The story about Dale Bumpers, lawyer, senator and a former Governor of Arkansas tells us something about investing your life in a pursuit that is worthwhile. He was in office as a United States Senator for 24 years and retired from the Senate in 1998. However, just two weeks into his retirement, he was asked to make the Closing Speech in President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial before the Senate. He made a speech in defence of the President that has been called a classic in political oratory.

Some 18 months after making the speech that saved the Clinton presidency, Dale Bumpers was admitted as a member of the Bar of the District of Columbia, at the age of 75. In his memoir, *The Best Lawyer in a One Lawyer Town*, he recounts an encounter with a guard at the Federal Courthouse. He had just set off the sensors to the metal detectors there.

"I looked up, and immediately in front of me was a black man about six feet four inches tall and perhaps sixty years old. He was staring at me with an inscrutable look. He had his scanner in hand, and I assumed he wanted me to "spread-eagle" in order to be scanned. Instead he said, "Senator Bumpers?"

"Yes."

He paused a moment and then, "You know, I cried when you said you wasn't going to run no more."

"That may be the highest compliment I have ever received," I said.

He paused a few seconds more and then said, "Would you give me a big hug?"

I said, "I would be honoured to give you a big hug."

It was an indescribably gratifying moment thatmade it all worthwhile."

We may not be called upon to save presidents and indeed the work at our pro bono initiatives is far less in the glamour stakes. But there's a certain magic that people who are involved in pro bono work can testify to. It is the gratitude of the community we help; people who will lament the day you say you are not going to run anymore, but nonetheless so grateful for the sacrifices you have made, they express it not in money terms, but in the genuine and heartfelt way of the guard at the courthouse. You see, it was not the President's gratitude which told Dale Bumpers of the worth of his work. It was the common man's hug.

Today, with your admission to the roll of advocates and solicitors, you are not just one out of another 429 lawyers added to the Profession. You can be a lawyer who really makes a difference to our community, someone able to recall, 20 or 30 years from now, the special moments when the person next to you in Court was looking at you, counting his blessings to have you as his lawyer and wise counsellor; grateful that you have made the practice of law your chosen profession. When that happens, you will realise that the practice of law and the sacrifices you have made, have been worthwhile.

To all of you once again, my heartiest congratulations on this proud occasion of your admission to the roll of Advocates & Solicitors of the Supreme Court of Singapore.

Lok Vi Ming, S.C.
President
Law Society of Singapore