
ADDRESS BY CHIEF JUSTICE YONG PUNG HOW

The Minister for Law, Professor S Jayakumar, Members of the Senate and Members of the Academy.

This is the second time that members of the Academy have gathered in these historic surroundings for a very special occasion. The last time was on 31st August 1990, when it was to mark the Official Opening of the Academy by the then Prime Minister and to confer on him the Honorary Fellowship of the Academy. This time, 19 months later, we meet again to honour, from our number, two men who between them have contributed a total of 106 years of distinction to the legal profession.

Mr David Marshall was admitted to the Bar on 4 February 1938 and Dr Wee Chong Jin was admitted on 11 March 1940. The total number of advocates and solicitors admitted in 1938 was only 11; in 1940, another 8 were admitted.

In the years since their admission to the Bar, the structure of the profession has changed considerably. This change has been especially pronounced in the period since independence, as a result of the breathless pace of economic development. So far this year, no less than 246 advocates and solicitors have already been admitted to the Bar, bringing the total number to more than 2,000. It is expected that at least another 100 will be admitted before the end of the year. Not all of them however will be going into active practice as advocates and solicitors. A few will go into the tertiary institutions, some others into the enlarged Legal Service, and yet others into the wide world of commerce and industry.

As they pursue their various chosen paths, this Academy will remain the one institution to which they will all belong. Through this Academy, they will continue to have opportunities through professional and social interaction to maintain their association with each other.

Since its official opening, the Academy has continued to make steady progress. In discharging its statutory function to disseminate knowledge of the laws, it has begun the publication of a new set of law reports for Singapore; to provide continuing legal education, it has begun to develop a sustained programme of lectures and seminars; above all, it has steadily gone about what must be its primary function in its early years — “to promote good relations and social interaction amongst members, and

between members and law students and persons concerned in the administration of law and justice in Singapore”.

We intend by such efforts to develop the collegiate spirit which is necessary “for pride in the profession and in its honourable standards and practices”. If our efforts and energies are to bear fruit, this will require the continued support of all members who share the vision of a vibrant professional institution that represents their aspirations.

Today, as we confer Honorary Fellowship and Membership for Life on Dr Wee Chong Jin and Mr David Marshall, we remind ourselves of the indelible marks that they have left on the legal profession. We also hope that, in the years ahead, this tradition of remembering the contributions of individual members who have given so much, so freely, will continue. In this way, the Academy will become an enduring institution embodying the cumulative experience of each generation.