

## Remarks at International Bridges to Justice (IBJ) Gala Dinner

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Good evening. I am honoured by your invitation to me, to join you in celebrating this new chapter in IBJ's growth.

Today, Singapore is home to more than 70 international non-profit organisations. These include inter-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations with a social, humanitarian or environmental focus, industry associations, philanthropic foundations, think-tanks, and corporate social responsibility organisations.

To facilitate interested organisations in setting up operations in Singapore, the International Organisations Programme Office was formed in 2007 by the Economic Development Board (EDB). Providing a 'one-stop-shop' facilitation for international non-profit organisations, the EDB's International Organisations Programme Office is committed to nurturing the growth of international non-profit organisations in Singapore. In setting up their office in Singapore, IBJ is one of the first international non-profit organisations to receive support from the EDB.

Singapore's strategic geographical location and its characteristics as a global business city, makes Singapore a natural base from which IBJ and other international bodies can expand their reach, particularly within the ASEAN region.

The presence of a cluster of well-connected international bodies such as IBJ will significantly enhance Singapore's hub status. Such international bodies provide a broad base of specialised activities and networks, which will contribute to the further development of Singapore's pro-business environment.

Singapore's focus and success in attracting talent to its shores is evident by the large number of international students and international professionals from all over the world, already residing and contributing to Singapore's economy. A group such as IBJ will provide

yet another outlet for this talent – that of a committed social enterprise sector, staffed by people who are looking to contribute more than just the bottom line.

Singapore is part of the ASEAN family, a network of 10 countries committed to the acceleration of economic growth, social progress and the protection of peace and security in its region. One of ASEAN's most significant developments is the establishment of the ASEAN Charter, which entered into force on 15 December 2008. Having become a rules-based regime with more accountability and transparency, this Charter will strengthen ASEAN's regional identity, governance, economic development and social justice. The ASEAN Charter is the firm foundation needed to achieve the ASEAN Community by 2015.

The ASEAN Community will be people-oriented. ASEAN aspires to provide a better quality of life and human security to all its citizens. In this respect, capacity building and skills upgrading are immediate concerns, particularly in the less developed ASEAN Member States. To this end, I believe that IBJ's focus on building and improving the legal capacity of less developed nations aligns squarely with ASEAN's priorities.

As IBJ operates in and has hosted training in several ASEAN Member States, IBJ's decision to base its regional hub in Singapore, will be mutually beneficial to the desires of both ASEAN and IBJ to increase social justice and human security.

IBJ will benefit from the considerable knowledge base and accessibility of resources in Singapore. As Singapore has developed an extensive cooperation programme aimed at enhancing capacity and skills in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, it is my hope that IBJ will be able to utilise and take advantage of the existing networks and mechanisms.

By providing direct technical support and training to emerging legal aid organisations around the world and to countries within ASEAN, IBJ is helping to promote the principles of democracy, rule of law, good governance, and respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. These elements are in the ASEAN Charter, and represent the ideals which ASEAN strives to achieve.

In closing, I would like to congratulate IBJ on its decision to be in Singapore and be part of the dynamic developments in Southeast Asia. I am confident that IBJ will find many suitable partners and resources in Singapore, which can help IBJ fulfil its mission.

I also want to acknowledge the farsightedness of the EDB in bringing more international non-profit organisations to Singapore. I wish the EDB more success in this initiative.

Thank you.

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