

Honourable Justice Lai Siu Chiu, our guest of honour, distinguished judges of the Supreme Court and Subordinate Courts of Singapore, President of the Law Society of Singapore, Mr Philip Jeyaretnam SC and members of the Law Society Council, fellow members of the LAWASIA executive committee, Chair of the LAWASIA Family Law and Family Rights Section, Mr Andrew Davies, distinguished guests and conference delegates.

On behalf of LAWASIA, it is my pleasure to welcome friends and colleagues to the second LAWASIA Children and the Law Conference and to wish all delegates a fulfilling and stimulating experience during the next two days of discussion.

LAWASIA pays tribute to the Law Society of Singapore for its willingness to host this special event. We especially applaud the efforts of the Law Society treasurer, and our LAWASIA ExCo member, Ms Malathi Das, as well as her colleagues on the organising committee and the staff at the Law Society of Singapore who have worked hard to produce a premium event.

It is a particular pleasure to see a further Children and the Law conference go ahead. LAWASIA arranged the first LAWASIA Children and Law Conference in Brisbane, Australia in June 2003 and it was a truly remarkable event.

It is rare to attend a conference where every delegate remains present until the very end of the last session. We were proud that the inaugural Children and Law Conference achieved that distinction. We are equally confident that the program ahead of you in the next two days will provide the same degree of interest to the very last presentation.

It is fitting during the opening address to make mention of one of the driving forces behind this conference who is not present with us in person, but whose legacy to the Singapore and international legal professions is one of continued inspiration.

Mr Palakrishnan SC, former president of the Law Society of Singapore, was also a member of LAWASIA's ExCo, a great lawyer and humanitarian and a valued friend to many. It was shortly after the first Children and Law Conference that he suddenly passed away.

Our last LAWASIA memories of Pala are of him enjoying a satisfying debriefing about the first Children and Law Conference and listening to his enthusiastic consideration of whether a reprise could be staged in Singapore.

It is then, a great pleasure to see one of his plans come to fruition through the work of those that he inspired. Those of you who knew Pala will understand how LAWASIA views this event as a promise kept by a friend who is sadly missed.

This conference program will focus on an area of the law and its application that is of the greatest importance to the future of all societies in the Asia Pacific region. How the legal system deals with and protects those members of our community who are the most vulnerable is a hallmark of civilised society and the conference program concentrates heavily on the many practical implications of this.

The speaker line-up combines considerable international legal expertise with that of others whose role it is:

- to analyse the decisions of the legal system as they affect children,
- to provide practical support and assistance in implementing these, and
- to work with families whose lives see them in closer contact with legal processes than they would prefer.

LAWASIA is happy to be a catalyst for the significant discussion that this combination of expertise will produce, and on your behalf, we especially acknowledge the excellent work of the Law Society in creating such a stimulating and well-rounded conference program.

LAWASIA also extends its congratulations to the Law Society on the launch of its publication *The Art of Family Lawyering*, which will, no doubt, become an essential, useful and practical tool to all who deal with family issues in Singapore.

The LAWASIA ExCo will also meet during the conference, and although our discussion will cover issues that extend well beyond the material covered in the conference, uppermost in our consideration will be the development of the LAWASIA Family Law and Family Rights Section under the leadership of Mr Andrew Davies, who is also one of our expert speakers at this conference.

I hope that delegates will take the opportunity of this conference to give serious consideration to joining LAWASIA and its Family Law Section. We are proud to be an organisation that has a specific focus on our own region and a unique understanding of the issues that confront it.

We have the opportunity to add strength to our Family Law Section through contact with those of you who work in this area and would warmly welcome your interest. In return, we can promise you the opportunity to add your views to the regional voice that LAWASIA represents. Mr Davies, our ExCo members and our Secretary-General would all be very pleased to discuss your interest with you and I encourage you to speak with them during the conference breaks.

I am sure that this conference will give you a very good idea of the scope and quality of LAWASIA's events and we encourage your participation in our organisation, as it is through the active support of our membership that we can achieve the most.

Ladies and gentlemen, again, I welcome you to this conference, and congratulate you on the interest that brings you here today. On behalf of LAWASIA, I wish you the best of deliberations during the work program, and encourage you to take advantage of the social occasions to get to know national and international colleagues who share your interest in this area.

We share the aspiration that this event will increase our knowledge, our networks and our enthusiasm for the important work that remains to be done in ensuring that the youngest members of our

community are afforded the best safeguards that the legal system and its community partners can provide.

Thank you.