

Our Guest of Honour, Prof Tommy Koh; Ambassadors; Mr Patrick Low, Chief Economist of the WTO; Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the NUS Faculty of Law and the Centre for International Law, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the launch of the Singapore Chair of the WTO Chairs Programme.

In 1996, I had just rejoined the Faculty of Law as a Vice-Dean after some time in practice. One of the first Faculty events I attended was Prof Tommy Koh's talk entitled "The WTO's First Ministerial Conference: the Negotiating Process" based on his experiences of the First Ministerial Conference held in Singapore. This was eventually published in the 1997 volume of the Singapore Journal of International and Comparative Law, a predecessor academic law journal to what is now the Asian Journal of International Law.

Michael Ewing-Chow had then just joined the Faculty of Law as a Senior Tutor. Michael was about to go off to Harvard Law School for his Masters. I remember that Michael was also in the audience for Tommy's talk. We both were learning about this new institution called the WTO which had only been established the year before.

Michael, and I have to say, he is only one of many, must have been inspired by Tommy. Despite spending a year in the corporate department of Allen & Gledhill, soon after Tommy's speech, he told the decanal team that he wanted to focus on World Trade Law at Harvard Law School. I recall being pleased about this because my instinct told me that the multi-lateral trade regime would likely over time have a profound effect on domestic law and this was an area the law school needed to have expertise in.

While at Harvard, Michael took courses on EU, NAFTA and WTO taught by Professor Joseph Weiler. When Michael returned in 1998, he was enthusiastic about two things: (a) starting a WTO law course and (b) Joseph Weiler's teaching. He eventually started the first WTO law course in Singapore together with Professors Dora Neo and Lim Chin Leng in 2001.

During this time, Margaret Liang and Ambassador See Chak Mun were with the Singapore Mission to the WTO. Coincidentally, Margaret and Chak Mun had formed a friendship with Chin Leng who worked at the UN Claims Commission in Geneva before joining NUS.

Of course, none of us could have imagined back then that we would all be here today for this Launch and participating in the Dialogue tomorrow. It is not often enough that the world of practice and the world of academia meet. Indeed, one of the purposes of the WTO Chairs Programme is to encourage more of this interaction. This is a worthy endeavour and we hope to facilitate more of this in the years to come.

It was only in 2006 that these worlds really started converging. NUS was selected to host the WTO's Regional Trade Policy Course which we hosted for 4 years from 2007 to 2010. Michael, Chin Leng and Dora were selected to participate in the RTPC as regional experts. In 2008, Margaret Liang had just retired from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Faculty was delighted when she agreed to join us as an Adjunct Professor and as Academic Coordinator for the RTPC, taking over from Hsu Locknie. Margaret also began guest lecturing in Michael's World Trade Law course. That year, as part of the NYU@NUS joint Masters programme, Professor Joseph Weiler also began co-teaching the course with Michael. Liu Gehuan, now a Research Associate of CIL and former Asst Academic Coordinator of the RTPC in 2010 was the top student in that 2008 World Trade Law course. It is always fascinating to see how the different threads come together to weave a wonderful tapestry.

Indeed, the RTPC has been a very successful partnership of weaving between NUS and the WTO. Close institutional ties and deep friendship have developed. Dr Patrick Low has been a great friend of Singapore and the law school and has taught in the RTPC every year that it was in Singapore. Thank you very much, Patrick, for your strong support over the years.

Over 100 trade officials from the Asia Pacific region have been trained in the RTPC in Singapore and we have been privileged to host them for 3 months a year at our Bukit Timah Campus. The OECD even published a case story about the success of the RTPC in Singapore and I understand that participants still talk about their time in the Bukit Timah Campus with fondness. This has been largely due to the efforts of the WTO and NUS teams involved in the RTPC and I must express my personal appreciation for their efforts. In this collaboration we find the essence of how I see the NUS Faculty of Law – an institution devoted to academic endeavour that makes a positive contribution to society.

On behalf of the Faculty of Law and the Centre for International Law I would also like to reiterate our commitment to the WTO and reinforce the strength of our relationship. The Policy Dialogue that the Faculty and Centre are hosting for the next 3 days is just one of many initiatives that we have planned as part of the Singapore WTO Chair Program and Phase II of NUS' collaboration with the WTO.

A word about CIL. CIL was only established in 2009. Its mandate is to develop international law in Asia. One of the major research areas of CIL is international trade law and policy. Michael holds a joint appointment with the Faculty and with CIL where he is Head of Trade/Investment Law & Policy. The timing for all these events could not have been better. The addition of a research centre into NUS's relationship with the WTO creates even more synergies for our collaboration.

So, as we begin a new chapter of NUS' relationship with the WTO with the establishment of the Singapore WTO Chair, I am delighted that we do so with Prof Tommy Koh as the Guest of Honour. As I highlighted at the beginning of my speech, in many ways this story started with Tommy and it is therefore most fitting that he is our Guest of Honour this evening.

Free trade faces many challenges today with the Financial Crisis and the slow pace of the Doha Round. The Future of the WTO has been questioned by some policy makers and academics. Nonetheless, I am confident that with the people involved in promoting free trade in the past, some of whom are in the room today, we will be able to look towards a better future. We at NUS hope to contribute to that future by supporting these efforts and training a new generation. We want in our own small way to further the work of the WTO.

Thank you and I wish all of you an enjoyable evening.