ANNEX B

CITATION BY PROFESSOR SIMON CHESTERMAN, DEAN, NUS FACULTY OF LAW
PUBLIC ORATOR FOR JUSTICE CHAO HICK TIN,
RECIPIENT OF HONORARY DOCTOR OF LAWS

NUS COMMENCEMENT 2018, MAIN CEREMONY
THURSDAY, 12 JULY 2018, NUS UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE

President of the Republic of Singapore and NUS Chancellor Madam Halimah Yacob
Justices
NUS Pro-Chancellors
NUS Chairman and Trustees
NUS President
Distinguished Honorary Graduand
Graduates, Parents and Friends
Ladies and Gentlemen

Justice Chao Hick Tin has spent his entire professional life — more than fifty years — working in public service in the pursuit of justice.

He completed his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Law from University College, London, in 1965 and 1966, he went almost immediately into the Attorney-General's Chambers, rising to the rank of Senior Counsel in 1979. Following two decades at AGC, he then joined the bench in 1987 as a Judicial Commissioner and then as a High Court Judge in 1990, and Judge of Appeal in 1999.

In 2006 he went back to AGC as Attorney-General. Two years later, he returned to the Supreme Court now as Vice-President of the Court of Appeal, a position he held until his retirement in 2017.

Such is the record of his service, ample enough to deserve a great many honours. But in the course of that magnificent career, Justice Chao has inspired the admiration and respect of all whom he has encountered — qualities that I will briefly describe as being a judge's judge, and a lawyer's lawyer.

Judge's judge

So what do I mean by being a "judge's judge"?

At the valedictory reference that marked Justice Chao's retirement, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon hailed him as a role model who "personified the very essence of what it means to be an excellent judge, and to do so with the right temperament".

The Chief Justice recalled a conversation with Senior Counsel Chelva Rajah, who had said that the entirety of his self-education as a judge was to ask himself every time he had a difficult situation, "What would Hick Tin do?"

"Many of us on the bench," Chief Justice Menon added, "would still say that this was our surest guide to resolving a judicial dilemma."

What would Hick Tin do?

One concrete indication of his value to the bench is that, having retired at the end of September 2017 after half a century of public service, he was given three months' off and then promptly reappointed as a senior judge in January of this year.

Lawyer's lawyer

Prior to going to the bench — where he is the only judge to have served under all four of Singapore's Chief Justices — Justice Chao had already demonstrated that he was also very much a "lawyer's lawyer".

Let me pick just one example from the beginning of his career, which was highlighted by Minister K. Shanmugam at the valedictory reference, and which is particularly timely today. In 1968, Hick Tin — then a 25-year-old lawyer in AGC — was asked to represent Singapore at the UN Conference on the Law of Treaties.

In the course of those discussions, Malaysia's representative observed that some treaties were so fundamental to the existence of states that they could not be dispensed with, whatever political differences might arise. "For example," the Malaysian diplomat continued, "the new island state of Singapore was dependent on Malaysia for its water supply; the treaty under which Malaysia had to supply a certain quantity of water daily to Singapore could not be terminated or suspended between the two States for any political reason."

Justice Chao quickly realised how important such a statement was and made sure that it went on record. And for this and the many other ways in which he protected and advanced Singapore's interests over the years, Minister Shanmugam observed that we always owe Justice Chao a deep debt of gratitude.

Conclusion

Madam Chancellor, in addition to the sharpness of his mind and the warmth of his heart, one of the qualities that many of Justice Chao's colleagues and peers routinely highlight is his deep humility.

I know, for example, that he finds occasions such as this somewhat embarrassing.

Yet the award of an honorary degree is only partly a recognition of the individual so honoured. It also serves as an inspiration to all of us, and to the next generation of lawyers in particular, many of whom are here with us today.

Madam Chancellor, Justice Chao's career tracks almost the entire history of independent Singapore. As a lawyer's lawyer, as a judge's judge, his commitment to serving and upholding the rule of law throughout that career underscores the importance of law to the stability and prosperity that Singapore enjoys today.

Madam Chancellor, for devoting his life to public service, to Singapore, and to the law, may it please you to confer on Justice Chao Hick Tin the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws.