

**Opening Address by Justice Andre Maniam
Chairperson, Singapore Mediation Centre**

Ambassador David Huebner,
Judges and colleagues of the Judiciary,
Colleagues of the Singapore Mediation Centre,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.

I. Welcome

1. Good morning and welcome to the Singapore Mediation Lecture and Appreciation Lunch 2026.
2. It is a pleasure to see so many members of the mediation community gathered here today.
3. This year is particularly significant as we approach the 30th anniversary of the Singapore Mediation Centre in 2027. It is fitting to reflect on how mediation has evolved over the past three decades, and what that evolution means for the profession, SMC and our stakeholders as we look ahead.

II. Why We Are Evolving

4. When SMC was established in 1997, mediation in Singapore was in its infancy, with few trained mediators. The priority then was to build awareness, grow the profession and establish mediation as a trusted and effective means of resolving disputes.
5. Over the past three decades, that landscape has transformed significantly. Singapore is now internationally recognised as a leading dispute resolution hub, supported by a strong pool of experienced mediators and an established mediation ecosystem.
6. With this maturity comes a different set of expectations. The mediation landscape is more competitive, with a wider range of services and practitioners, while disputes are becoming more complex, increasingly cross border and more technology enabled.
7. Users have become more sophisticated and, so too, what they expect at every stage of the mediation journey, from case management and mediator expertise to the quality of facilities and the overall service experience. As the landscape evolves, SMC must continue to build on the strong foundations established over the years and further enhance the quality of what we deliver.

8. Our focus must therefore shift from growing the profession and increasing the number of mediators to strengthening excellence, capability and professional standards.
9. Our main objective: ***to ensure that parties who choose mediation through SMC have access to outstanding mediators, professional services and the best possible mediation experience, supported by strong operational capabilities.***

III. What We Are Doing

10. Against this backdrop, our efforts are centred on two areas: strengthening the quality and capabilities of our mediators and enhancing the quality of the mediation services we provide.

A. Strengthening the Quality and Capabilities of Mediators

11. First, we want to support our mediators in deepening their expertise and building sustainable practices through professional development, regular practice and meaningful case exposure.
12. As mediators today are increasingly experienced and practice ready, our approach must evolve accordingly. This means providing opportunities to advance their skills, reviewing casework and performance on an ongoing basis and supporting their continued professional growth.

B. Enhancing the Quality of Mediation Services

13. At the same time, the parties, counsel and mediators must be supported by mediation services of an equally high standard.
14. Our commitment is therefore to deliver not only strong mediator expertise, but also professional services and a quality user experience throughout a party's engagement with SMC.

IV. Key Changes

15. To achieve this, we will focus on two key areas: how we strengthen the professional development of our mediators and how we structure our mediator panels.

A. Continuing Legal Education and Professional Development

16. First, we are strengthening the professional development opportunities available to our mediators.
17. SMC, together with its parent organisation, the Singapore Academy of Law, will regularly curate specialist workshops to support the professional growth of mediators. The focus will be on deepening expertise, strengthening sector specific knowledge and equipping mediators with advanced techniques that enhance their effectiveness in delivering better outcomes for parties.
18. Continuous learning is essential to maintaining high standards of practice. SMC mediators will therefore be expected to actively participate in professional development each year, with greater emphasis on advancing the capabilities of experienced mediators beyond foundational training.
19. In line with this commitment to continuous improvement, SMC is also reviewing and refreshing its foundational Strategic Conflict Management Programme, or SCMP, to ensure that it remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of professionals. This review comes despite the programme's continued success and strong demand, with close to 600 participants having completed the SCMP courses and mediation assessment in FY2025/26 alone.
20. The sustained popularity of the programme is a testament to the value it continues to deliver. At the same time, it reflects SMC's philosophy that excellence requires constant renewal. Even where our programmes are performing well, we remain committed to reviewing our offerings to ensure that they continue to meet the highest standards and equip practitioners with the necessary skills in today's world.
21. In addition, as the mediation landscape continues to evolve, it is increasingly evident that successful mediation outcomes are shaped not only by the mediator, but equally by the effectiveness of mediation advocates. Recognising the critical role that mediation advocates play in achieving successful outcomes, SMC, together with SAL, will be launching a Mediation Advocacy Course designed to equip practitioners with the skills and techniques required to advocate effectively in mediation.

B. Modernising Our Mediator Panels

22. Apart from strengthening the quality of our mediators and mediation advocates, we are looking into modernising our mediator panel framework.
23. In a mature mediation landscape, the quality of mediators is more important than ever. We are therefore exploring ways to evolve our mediator panel framework to better support excellence and professional development. One area under consideration is the transition from the current Principal and Associate Mediator panels to a unified Lead Mediator Panel by mid-2027, which will be a smaller and more focused panel than the two it would replace.

24. The objective is to provide lead mediators more regular opportunities to mediate. By aligning the size of the active panel more closely with our caseload, we hope to provide mediators with more consistent case exposure and opportunities to strengthen their mediation capabilities. We strongly encourage lead mediators to take on a broad spectrum of cases assigned by SMC.
25. We will take a more strategic approach to case allocation. A more focused and active panel will enable us to better match parties with mediators who have appropriate experience and expertise for each case.
26. Building a meaningful and sustainable mediation practice is a **collective effort** grounded in the **partnership** between SMC and its mediators. Mediators will also build their practices through cases they independently source through their professional standing and networks. Together, we can grow our mediation work and contribute to the wider development of mediation in Singapore.
27. **Ultimately, these changes are intended to give disputing parties the best possible chance of achieving a successful mediation outcome.**
28. Appointment of the Lead Mediator Panel will be based on a holistic assessment of factors including a mediator's experience and track record in mediation, the quality of the mediator's conduct of the process and the outcomes achieved, feedback from parties and their counsel, relevant legal or specialist expertise, and the extent to which parties have themselves previously sought the mediator's appointment, among other considerations.
29. This selection process will also provide an opportunity for mediators interested in joining the Lead Mediator Panel to express their interest, with this considered as part of the overall assessment. For those who are not appointed initially, there will continue to be opportunities to build their experience and track record and indicate their interest in future. Importantly, the panel will not be static. Its composition will be reviewed regularly, providing a pathway for other mediators to join as they continue to build their experience and own track record.
30. As we implement these changes, we will listen closely to feedback from our mediators, parties and stakeholders, and monitor their impact in practice. We will remain agile and responsive and be prepared to adjust where needed as we learn from their implementation.
31. The Lead Mediator Panel will sit alongside the existing Senior Mediator Panel. The Senior Mediator Panel will continue to recognise mediators with extensive experience, including in complex domestic and international disputes.
32. Our mediator community will continue to be an important part of SMC. We will be sharing plans about the creation of an alumni network for mediators to maintain their affiliation with the Singapore Mediation Centre.
33. Alumni members are an important part of the SMC community, bringing with them valuable experience, perspectives and contributions to the development of mediation. Alumni members will also be able to stay connected and continue their professional development through relevant updates, SMC courses

and programmes, the Singapore Mediation Lecture and broader industry platforms such as TechLaw.Fest. These opportunities will enable us to continue learning from one another, deepen our collective experience and contribute together to the continued growth of mediation.

34. This restructuring reflects the broader evolution of the mediation profession. As recognised in a recent review of the mediation landscape by the Ministry of Law and the Singapore International Mediation Institute, “*mediator quality is increasingly demonstrated through **practical experience, institutional appointments and a proven track record, rather than accreditation***”. SMC's revised panel framework is aligned with this evolution.

V. Preparing Mediators for the Future

35. The changes I have mentioned are ultimately about giving parties the best chance of a successful mediation — by matching them with mediators who are actively practising and bring current, relevant experience to the table.
36. Another area that will increasingly shape professional practice is technology, particularly generative AI. SMC will continue to explore how technology can be used thoughtfully and practically to support our mediators and the mediation process.
37. Mediation is, at its heart, a profoundly human endeavour — built on empathy, neutrality, and the ability to read a room — and that is something generative AI cannot replace. Used thoughtfully, however, it can be a genuinely useful aid.
38. It is with this in mind that SMC, in partnership with Microsoft, has developed the **Prompt Engineering Guide for Mediators** — a concise, practical framework organised around the mediation lifecycle, from preparation, through the live session, to post-mediation documentation. It shows how a well-structured prompt can turn a general-purpose tool into a reliable one, while keeping firmly in place the safeguards that matter most to our profession: confidentiality, neutrality, and the independent verification of every output.
39. I am pleased to launch the Guide today and it is now made available for download on the SMC website.
40. A guide, of course, is only as valuable as our willingness to use it — and I recognise that not all are natural early adopters of new technology. In this regard, SMC and SAL will conduct training to equip mediators with practical skills in using generative AI responsibly and effectively. The aspiration is a simple one: that every mediator, from the newly accredited to our most experienced hands, can approach this technology with confidence and use it well.

VI. Closing

41. Before I conclude, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Justice Belinda Ang, who served as Chairperson of the SMC from 2012 to 2025, and the previous board members for their leadership and contributions to SMC over the years. We remain deeply grateful for their dedication and stewardship, which have laid a strong foundation for SMC's continued success and growth. I look forward to working closely with our current directors to build on the progress achieved thus far and continue advancing SMC's mission in the years ahead.
42. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to our Sponsor, Aequitas Law LLP; our Academic Partners, SMU and SIDRA; our mediators and adjudicators; and our partners across the legal community.
43. Your expertise, dedication and steadfast support have been instrumental in advancing mediation in Singapore, building SMC and making today's event possible. We are deeply grateful for your continued partnership and commitment to Singapore's dispute resolution ecosystem.
44. At this point I wish to thank Ambassador David Huebner who has agreed to deliver today's keynote address. Ambassador Huebner has had a distinguished career spanning diplomacy, law and international dispute resolution, and I am sure his insights will provide us with much to reflect upon as we consider the future of mediation.
45. I wish you an engaging and enriching morning. Thank you.