

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great personal pleasure that I send this message of greeting to you.

Almost exactly 20 years ago, I met a young German student in Singapore. I was then just starting my career as a lecturer in the Law Faculty of NUS and he was on an exchange programme. That student is Dr Axel Reeg, to whom I would like to convey my warmest congratulations on the launch of the German-Singaporean Lawyers Association. It is extremely gratifying that the student exchange programme which was initiated by Professor Rauschnig and Professor Jayakumar (now Foreign Minister Jayakumar) should bear fruit in this way.

Germany is one of our most significant economic partners in the world. The establishment of this Association is another important building block in our relationship with Germany and with Europe. As part of the common law world, we are often woefully ignorant of how the civil lawyers think and function. This Association can provide a bridge between our two legal cultures and a forum within which lawyers from both countries may interact.

Beyond economics, however, it is important that we in Singapore understand the new Germany that has emerged since the fall of the Berlin Wall over a decade ago. An understanding of the law is a gateway to understanding the culture and mindset of a nation. Stereotypes formed by the Anglo-Saxon press dominate the image of Singapore in Germany and that of Germany in Singapore. It is only through a process of personal contact that we can move beyond the stereotypes to a true understanding of one another's cultures and *mores*. It is my hope that the German-Singaporean Lawyers Association will play a leading role in fostering a closer people-to-people relationship between our two countries.

May I congratulate the organisers on their sterling efforts and wish all of you a successful conference.

Professor Walter Woon
Ambassador of Singapore in Germany
25 May 2001