Good afternoon and welcome to our annual appreciation lunch. I am glad to see many familiar and new faces as we gather here at this annual event to express SMC’s recognition of your efforts and support throughout the year, and in particular, I thank you for your renewed support as we continue our journey to professionalise mediation in Singapore.

In 2012, I spoke of the need to professionalise mediation. There is much to do before this ambitious goal is achieved.
3  Indeed, you, our mediators, are at the heart of our vision for mediation. We encourage you to aspire to be part of a group of professionals who have outstanding mediation credentials and consider mediation a core part of your practice. You will form the pool of full time mediators, many with subject-matter expertise, who will be fully plugged in to the many new opportunities as Singapore opens up as a centre for mediation in Asia.

4  Many of you would have read the recommendations of the “Working Group on International Commercial Mediation” announced in December 2013 to develop Singapore’s mediation infrastructure. The Ministry of Law has accepted the recommendations and two new bodies will be formed. They are the Singapore International Mediation Centre, or SIMC, which will grow Singapore’s capability as an international mediation hub, and the Singapore International Mediation Institute, or SIMI, which will set standards and provide accreditation for mediators. We welcome these new developments as they will provide the
impetus to galvanise SMC’s endeavours to professionalise mediation. In the new scheme of things, SMC will continue to retain its focus on domestic mediation and training, and will work hand in hand with SIMC and SIMI to provide best-of-class mediation services for Singapore.

5 For the past two years, SMC has been laying the groundwork that is needed to professionalise mediation. The first step in nurturing a pool of skilled mediators was the restructuring of SMC’s panels, which we completed early last year. The revamp of the Panel of Principal Mediators focused on refreshing skills, establishing criteria for renewal of terms of appointment and developing the expertise of senior mediators. Mediators were also offered the opportunity to choose whether they wished to charge their hourly rates or follow SMC’s prescribed fee scale. Of the 143 original panel members, 98 opted to continue on the Panel.
6 We also reviewed our fee scales, towards the objective of making mediation a viable profession, and not just a form of service to the community. Under our Commercial Mediation Scheme, Principal Mediators have seen their minimum fees rise by about 50% per day, while Associate Mediators can now co-mediate higher-quantum disputes and earn a fee per day instead of the previous honorarium. We will continue to calibrate the fee structure to help you make it a profession.

7 Concurrently, we have ramped up opportunities for mediators to enhance their skills through continuing education seminars. SMC will continue to seek out opportunities to scale up your skills so that they remain relevant and help you to develop as professional mediators.

8 We have also expanded our volunteer mediation schemes with the courts to bring you additional platforms to practice your skills and gain experience. In November last year, we worked with
the Crime Registry of the State Courts to start a pilot programme for our mediators to mediate the Magistrate’s complaint cases. I am pleased to note that the programme will continue and more mediators will be enrolled. A pilot programme with the Syariah Court of Singapore for Malay-speaking mediators will also commence on the 1st of October to mediate Muslim divorces, including facilitating discussions on shared parenting plans and ancillary matters.

9 To augment our efforts over the last two years, I am pleased to announce that from today, SMC will be offering parties a listing of mediators by industry specialisation. We have carefully crafted ten areas of specialisation to cater to demand from businesses. This will make it easier for businesses to obtain your services and bring our mediators a step closer to making mediation a core part of their mainstream practice.
10 The pace to professionalise domestic mediation will be stepped up. SMC’s mediation caseload, which has thus far largely come through the courts, has been steadily increasing. In 2013, it grew 38% from the previous year, and based on the first six months of this year, we are confident that it will continue to grow.

11 To forge ahead, for the next phase, SMC’s plans for 2014 and beyond are to increase the number, quality and diversity of commercial mediations, outside the court referral process, in four priority segments – Healthcare, Insurance, Construction & Infrastructure and Small & Medium Enterprises.

12 SMC has also tied up a couple of new institutional partnerships to build new channels of mediation work for you:

(i) Supported by MOH Holdings, a pilot Healthcare Mediation Scheme was launched to offer subsidised mediation services for disputes between patients and healthcare institutes. 42
SMC mediators have been appointed by MOH Holdings as specialist healthcare mediators for this scheme.

(ii) Next, a Memorandum of Intent was signed with the Personal Data Protection Commission to provide mediation for disputes that arise under the new Personal Data Protection Act.

13 Our development plans can only be built on the foundation of a strong, distinct brand. We have all heard that mediation is often perceived as an option for the party with a weaker case. SMC will lead the way not only to change this debate, but to brand mediation as a strategic conflict management tool for every business. Mediation should not be a “Plan B” that businesses look to only when they are in trouble. A business that integrates conflict management into their management model, is a business that will be better prepared for disputes, better protected against risk, and have better control over commercial relationships.
And who better to talk about the role of mediation in business than the General Counsel of a multinational company. I am pleased to announce that Mr Brackett Denniston III, the man behind General Electric Company’s (or GE) global legal operations for the past decade, will deliver this year’s Singapore Mediation Lecture on the 26th of September. He will address the role of mediation in corporate strategy. His GE brainchild, the so-called “early-dispute-resolution programme”, has been a milestone accomplishment. The programme “measures litigation cost and impact and tries to control it by the use of early case analysis and earlier dispute resolution, before most of the cost and impact is incurred.” GE will litigate when necessary, but only after its lawyers analyse the potential costs, the chances of winning, and the risks. This corporate outlook makes business sense and suggests that the time will come when law firms must be able to offer their clients a full suite of alternative dispute resolution services.
In conclusion, I would like to renew our commitment to make mediation a service that will grow new revenue streams for all of you as mediation rises in importance for the business community. We hope you will continue journeying with us to grow the “mediation culture and space” in Singapore.

Thank you again for your immense contributions and for making the time to join us today.

On this note, I am pleased to introduce to you - SMC’s new visual identity.

~ END ~