

**Keynote Address by Attorney-General Lucien Wong, S.C. at the  
37th Cambridge International Symposium on Economic Crime**

**2 September 2019**

**“Fighting economic crime – a shared responsibility!”**

1. Mr Chairman, Saul Froomkin QC, Professor Barry A. K. Rider, distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you to Professor Rider for inviting me once again to deliver one of the keynote addresses. I am very pleased to be here. In another life, before I took office as the Attorney-General of Singapore, I acted for private institutions and large corporates. So I know what it is like to be on both sides, if you like.

2. It is believed that around 500 BC, Pythagoras introduced the concept that the world is round. As far as I know, it remains so. But in recent years, some 2,500 years after Pythagoras, writers such as Thomas Friedman, have advocated, that the world is flat – metaphorically. That due to globalisation and technological advancements, historical and geographical divisions are increasingly irrelevant in our world.

3. This flat world, facilitates the money trail across countries. For Singapore, sitting at the crossroads of global trade and financial flows, we feel the “flatness” acutely. A recent count of the World Bank, places Singapore’s total trade at 322% of our GDP. Singapore has the second busiest port and the sixth busiest airport in the world. Singapore is also one of the largest international financial centres. Apart from the movement of people and goods, Singapore sees a significant flow of funds from the region and the world:

- (a) Singapore is ranked second globally as an international wealth management centre;

- (b) Singapore-based asset managers manage a total of US\$2.4 trillion in assets, with 78% of these assets under management sourced from outside Singapore.

4. However, just as businesses and individuals are attracted to carry out legitimate business in Singapore, unfortunately, so too are criminals and their syndicates keen to exploit Singapore's business and banking networks for unlawful gain. With the flat world that we live in, who then bears the responsibility for combating these criminals?

5. This brings me to the theme of this year's symposium "fighting economic crime – a shared responsibility!" As the bulk of transnational economic crimes involve the laundering of criminal proceeds, I would like to share with everyone the three-pronged approach which Singapore takes. *First*, providing strong mutual legal assistance. *Second*, effective prosecution of money-laundering offences, to deter would-be offenders from committing cross-border crimes and dealing with the proceeds. *Third*, adopting a robust approach to tracing and recovering proceeds of crime to further deter offenders by depriving them of their illicit gains.

**A. *Providing mutual legal assistance***

6. An integral part of our shared responsibility, is our provision of mutual legal assistance or MLA to foreign authorities. In a "flat" world where cross-border economic crime has become increasingly commonplace, domestic law enforcement agencies can no longer afford to work in silos – they must rely on the assistance of their foreign counterparts to trace cross-border fund flows and to gather evidence.

7. In Singapore, my office receives and processes MLA requests from foreign authorities under the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act or "MACMA" framework. Under this

framework, we render several types of assistance relevant to the investigation and prosecution of criminals, as well as asset recovery, such as the taking of evidence of witnesses in Singapore for the purposes of criminal proceedings, procuring production orders to retrieve documents and financial records, freezing of assets, enforcement of foreign confiscation orders, executing search and seizure orders *etc.*

8. Singapore has been receiving an increasing number of such requests in recent years. We nonetheless take each request seriously, and pursue each request and engage in informal and direct communications with the foreign authorities to expedite matters.

9. With the globalisation of criminal activity, and greater awareness of the MLA regime, there will undoubtedly be more MLA requests to and from Singapore in the future. As we have done in the past, my office will continue to look at ways to refine the effectiveness and efficiency of our processes.

***B. The effective prosecution of money-laundering offences***

10. Given the increased complexity of money-laundering offences, a multi-disciplinary approach underpins our approach to the prosecution of money-laundering offences. My officers work closely with our enforcement agencies and regulators, operating effectively as joint teams, early on in the investigation stage. This allows us to assess the mound of material that invariably surfaces in such cases, from multiple perspectives. Such upstream involvement, greatly aids in the effective securing of convictions.

*C. Tracing and recovery of criminal proceeds*

11. My office also works closely with our foreign counterparts, and domestic law enforcement agencies, to trace and recover proceeds from transnational crimes.

*Ezubao Ponzi scheme*

12. One example relates to a Ponzi scheme which originated in the People's Republic of China. In 2014, Yucheng International Holdings Group ("**Yucheng**") launched Ezubao which became China's largest peer-to-peer lending platform. The platform promised returns of up to 14.6% and attracted more than 74.7 billion yuan (US\$10 billion) in investments. It was later discovered that Ezubao had made up fake investment projects and had pocketed investors' funds. Around 1.15 million investors were affected by the Ponzi scheme.

13. We received information that the former president of Yucheng, had maintained significant sums of monies in Singapore. We further uncovered that more than US\$20 million had been transferred to Singapore for the planned purchase of a seaside bungalow in one of Singapore's most coveted neighbourhoods. Thankfully, our law enforcement agencies seized the monies before the purchase of the property went through, and obtained a Court order to repatriate more than US\$20 million of seized funds, to the China authorities.

14. The example that I have highlighted, demonstrate Singapore's commitment to the international community, to disgorge the illicit benefits held by international criminals. We will play our part in combating cross-border economic crimes, and will not tolerate any attempt by international criminals to abuse our financial system by treating it as a refuge or conduit for illicit fund flows.

*D. Conclusion*

15. I began this morning, speaking about the closely connected nature of our world. Yet, even now, there are those who speak of de-globalisation, of regional blocs developing, along stronger nationalistic and religious lines. Even if such developments take place, they are unlikely to shake the global networks of financial flows. Such geographical divisions in the midst of a financial network that remain international in scope, makes it more challenging for all of us, in this business of combating economic crime. It makes it all the more important then, that we gather from different countries, as we do at this symposium, to better understand each other and work together. Please let me wish all of you, a very good symposium. Thank you.