A-G: I can do more through teaching

S'poreans need 'the best training' to compete with foreign-trained lawyers

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ATTORNEY-GENERAL Walter Woon, who will step down from his post next month, has said he can do more by teaching than by remaining in his current A-G position.

In his first comments since Wednesday’s announcement, he said the Attorney-General’s post was, in any case, one he had planned to hold for only two years, with an eye on returning to teaching law.

“At this point of my life, I think I can make a more significant contribution through teaching and writing,” he said.

His response to media queries on the announcement came yesterday in a brief statement which covered his plans and looked back on his stint as Public Prosecutor and the Government’s chief legal adviser.

Professor Woon, 54, will be replaced by Senior Counsel Sundararaj Menon in October. In the interim, current Solicitor-General Koh Jiut Jong will be the A-G.

Prof Woon will return to the National University of Singapore (NUS) Law Faculty. He will also become the first dean of the new Singapore Institute of Legal Education (SILE), a body to oversee and provide professional legal training and practice standards.

Wearing these two hats will enable him to pass on the “wide range of experience” he has accumulated, he said. He noted that as more foreign-trained lawyers come to Singapore to practise, “we must make sure that our own people receive the best training we can give so that they can compete”.

Leaving the Attorney-General’s job will also give him more time to visit international law institutions in Europe and the United States.

This will keep him abreast of international law, a key area to which Singapore is devoting resources to become “a centre of intellectual activity”, he said.

On a personal front, he also said that he will spend more time with his sons, who are in Cambridge University.

Prof Woon described his exit as A-G as having been “extremely interesting and educational” — but also “taxing”.

“I leave secure in the knowledge that we have a good team in Chambers and that the system works,” he said.

His room back at the Faculty of Law is waiting for him. Contacted, NUS law dean Tan Cheng Han said faculty members are “very happy and excited” about Prof Woon’s return.

It has been a long drought. Prof Woon left in 1997 and, in the next nine years, served as Singapore’s envoy to several European states. Then, he joined the Attorney-General’s Chambers, serving two years first as Solicitor-General and then as A-G.

Prof Tan said although Singapore profited from Prof Woon’s time in public service, his departure was a loss to the law school, felt particularly in the area of company law.

He added that it made sense for Prof Woon to rejoin the law school next month, which will give him four months until the new academic year in August to prepare for his classes and write papers.

He said he had yet to discuss his plans for Prof Woon, but he expects him to teach company law and possibly criminal law.

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