

S'pore gets first female Solicitor-General

Koh Juat Jong takes over from Walter Woon, who is new AG

Thursday • April 10, 2008

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A PRESIDENT'S Scholar has become the first woman to be appointed the Solicitor-General (SG) in the Attorney-General's Chambers here.

Ms Koh Juat Jong (picture), 48, will leave her role as the Registrar of the Supreme Court, and assume her new post tomorrow.

As SG, she will work closely with the new Attorney-General (AG), Professor Walter Woon, 52, in advising ministries and departments on questions of law.

Prof Woon, the current SG, has been appointed to the post of AG for two years, said a statement from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) yesterday.

Mr Chao Hick Tin, 65, the current AG, ends his two-year term today. He returns to the judiciary as a Judge of Appeal at the Supreme Court tomorrow, said the PMO statement.

As SG, Ms Koh will also help the AG oversee the drafting of legislation, and represent the Government in legal proceedings.

"I am honoured to be entrusted with the responsibilities of the new appointment as Solicitor-General," she said. "My last four years as the Registrar of the Supreme Court has been a rewarding and memorable experience."

Ms Koh joined the Legal Service in 1989 when she was posted to the AG's Chambers as state counsel. She was then posted to the Supreme Court in 1994 as senior assistant registrar before becoming a district judge in 1995, and later the Principal District Judge in the Family and Juvenile Justice Division.

Ms Koh was appointed Registrar of the Supreme Court in December 2003.

Of her new appointment, Ms Koh said: "There will be much to learn when I assume the new position and I give my commitment to do my utmost in carrying out the new duties."

As AG, Prof Woon will act for the Government in any legal action brought against it. Most recently, Mr Chao fought Singapore's case in the dispute with Malaysia over Pedra Branca, which was heard at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Prof Woon, who returned to Singapore after nine years abroad as an ambassador and joined the AG's Chambers in October 2006 as Second SG, told today that his latest appointment was "not a surprise".

He had known for "some months" that he was under consideration to succeed Mr Chao, Prof Woon said.

The new AG was called to the Singapore Bar in 1985 and served as the vice-dean of the law faculty at the National University of Singapore. There, he held a practicing certificate even while he was in the faculty.

As a Nominated Member of Parliament from 1992 to 1996, Prof Woon's legacy was the introduction of the Maintenance of Parents Bill — it remains the only Act passed by Parliament since 1965 that was not initiated by the Government.

"This rather miscellaneous collection of experiences gives me a wider perspective of the law and how it works in a national and international context," he said. "My primary task as AG is to uphold the rule of law impartially and fairly."

Mr Foo Chee Hock, the Deputy Registrar of the Supreme Court, has been appointed as the Acting Registrar, with effect from tomorrow.

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