

WELCOME ADDRESS
BY DR CHOONG MAY LING, MIMI, CEO, HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 9TH ASIAN FORENSIC SCIENCES
NETWORK ANNUAL MEETING & SYMPOSIUM,
4 SEPTEMBER 2017

Guest of Honour, Mr Desmond Lee, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, and
Second Minister for Home Affairs and National Development,

Mr Somn Promaros, AFSN President and Director General of the Central
Institute of Forensic Science, Thailand,

Mr Clarence Ti, Principal, Ngee Ann Polytechnic,

Distinguished experts,

Guests and Participants,

1. On behalf of the Health Sciences Authority of Singapore, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to all participants of this 9th AFSN Annual Meeting and Symposium.

2. It is a great honour for HSA to host this year's symposium for the AFSN. HSA was one of the six founding institutes of the AFSN back in 2008. In the nine years since, the annual AFSN meeting has emerged as the leading forensic conference in Asia, allowing scientists in the region to discuss advances in forensic science, and enhance quality systems. Even more important, the AFSN has fostered collaboration and cooperation. This is evident from the many successful projects that the workgroups have undertaken, such as the inter-laboratory DNA comparison exercises, which allowed the participating labs to benchmark methodologies and interpretations, the explosive database that facilitates knowledge sharing on

explosives, as well as special drug analysis courses that enhance members' knowledge on the testing of illicit drugs.

3. Forensic Science is an integral part of the criminal justice system. It is vital in aiding the investigation of a crime and detection of criminals, as well as proving the innocence of people suspected of crimes that they did not commit. Without the objective evidence obtained through scientific analysis, many crime cases would have gone unsolved and the perpetrators unpunished. It is hence of utmost importance that forensic scientists gather together to learn and advance the science we use.
4. Technology has been described as both an enabler of, and leveler between, societies. Indeed, technology has changed the way we work. It has also changed the way crime syndicates work. Crimes have gone from national to international, from the physical to the virtual and digital. Today's society sees a tussle between criminals and law enforcement – who is better able to harness and leverage on the rapid advances in technology. It is, therefore, vital that law enforcement and forensic scientists keep pushing the boundaries, and improve on the methodologies and technological platforms to detect and analyse evidence of crime.
5. It is hence very apt for this year's symposium to adopt the theme "*Advancing Forensic Science in a Rapidly Changing World*". We are very honoured to have 19 distinguished speakers from around the world with us this week. Each of you is a renowned expert in your own field, and I would like to thank all of you for so graciously accepting our invitation to speak at this symposium, despite your busy schedules.

6. The observation and interpretation of evidence is a fundamental tenet of forensic science. We have just heard from our first keynote speaker how cognitive bias may unwittingly cloud the objectivity of such interpretations, and the measures we can take to avoid it. The various workgroups have also lined up strong programmes, and I would like to highlight a few.
7. The emergence of new psychoactive substances has created many new challenges for forensic labs and law enforcement. I am pleased to note that the Toxicology and Illicit Drugs Workgroups have planned special lectures in this challenging area. The Illicit Drugs Workgroup also has a one-day training on Clandestine Drug Laboratory Investigation – an important topic for Asia, as this region is well known to be a high producer of synthetic amphetamines.
8. The Trace Evidence Workgroup has a 1.5-day workshop on soil forensics - a seldom talked about, but important, aspect of trace evidence. We have seen a few cases where the examination of soil has brought about important evidence that strengthened crime scene reconstructions.
9. DNA analyses, coupled with a DNA database, allow an individual to be identified. But increasingly, jurisdictions elsewhere have many questions about the activities that led to the deposition of the DNA profile and its relevance in the crime context. So I am glad to note that this theme is being discussed in the DNA Workgroup programme.
10. Crime scene reconstruction is a very complex area of forensics that combines the results from various forensic disciplines to form as complete a picture as possible about what might have happened during the crime. The Crime Scene Investigation Workgroup has dedicated one day of training to illustrate the value and pitfalls of crime scene reconstruction. The workshop will focus on how to get it right from the start, and the importance of

producing reconstruction results that are scientifically robust and supported by fundamental principles.

11. A total of 647 delegates from 83 institutes in 21 countries are attending the symposium this week. We are deeply encouraged by the large numbers of overseas participants who registered for this symposium. I hope this week will provide you with ample opportunities for enriching exchanges with fellow scientists in Asia.
12. I would like to express my thanks to the symposium Organising Committee, the AFSN Board and the Workgroups for their hard work over many months in putting together an outstanding programme. I would also like to thank the sponsors who have facilitated this event through their generous sponsorships.
13. A special thanks to the Singapore Police Force and the Central Narcotics Bureau for allowing our overseas delegates to visit your forensic facilities and to INTERPOL, for opening your doors to the R&D facility within the INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation. I am sure these visits will provide delegates with new insights that they can bring back to their own labs.
14. In planning for this year's symposium, the organising committee took a fresh approach to bring the symposium closer to the community and into a school campus. My heartfelt thanks to the Ngee Ann Polytechnic for readily accepting our invitation to be HSA's local co-organiser for this symposium. Let me now invite its principal, Mr Clarence Ti, to say a few words. Mr Ti, please.