

## Admissions Ceremony

Thursday 16 December 1999

10.15am

Chief Justice's observations

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Judges, I congratulate you on your admission today, and warmly wish you well for the future. We particularly note the commendably high performance of the Honours graduates. It is also very important that we note today, as well as your own particular high achievement, the contribution undoubtedly made by your families, friends, and other supporters.

You join the legal profession at a time which is historically very interesting: not just because of the approach of the year 2000, but also because the profession is actively reassessing a number of its traditional approaches. If you enter into the legal profession as such, and most of you probably will, I urge you to become involved in these debates, and to make your own contribution.

You join, by the way, a numerically substantial profession. I was interested recently to compare that aspect of the profession with the position six decades ago, just before the outbreak of the second World War. Our Supreme Court in 1939 comprised only seven Judges. Now we have as many as twenty-four. There were, in 1939, only about 60 practising barristers in Brisbane, compared with 498 State wide now. State wide then there were only about 450 solicitors, now as many 4,748 holding practising certificates. It is, as I say, a large profession now, but I am sure you will, given wise application, find your own niche.

What should distinguish you as professionals is a commitment to the public interest or the common good – a commitment you give in return for the privileges you now enjoy, especially of course the right to appear before these and other courts, which is what distinguishes you from other professionals. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor of the United States Supreme Court put the matter pithily a decade ago when she said:

"One distinguishing feature of any profession, unlike other occupations that may be equally respectable, is that membership entails an ethical obligation to temper one's selfish pursuit of economic success by adhering to standards of conduct that could

not be enforced either by legal fiat or through the discipline of the market."

I hope you will always give primacy to the promotion of the public interest, and thereby, ethical principle of the highest order.

I urge you in that context particularly to remember those without advantage in our society: the weak, the marginalised and the friendless, and to be driven by a concern to address what is our single greatest problem within the law, limited accessibility to justice.

We live in a robust democracy here, a free society in which the rule of law is so secure that it might almost be taken for granted. You now become part of the mechanism which ensures that it is not, but remains the cornerstone of our civilisation.

In encouraging you to these high ideals, I speak not only for the Judges, but for the whole community. For whatever criticism may sometimes fashionably be levelled at your new profession and much of it is without foundation it is a noble profession, and membership of it will inspire the sort of public service which will, I hope, mark you all as true professionals.

And for those of you who may not enter into legal practice as such, I am sure that you will always nevertheless continue to appreciate the moral values and intellectual rigour which underpin the qualifications you have gained: they will serve you very well, whatever your particular endeavour.

You all go forward now with our confidence, and very best wishes for the future.