

I was a lawyer  
by day and a...



ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

# Money launderer by night

Ex-convict Kenneth Rijock (above) shares his inside knowledge to help fight financial crimes

BY BONNIE OENI

MR KENNETH Rijock spent the 1980s working as a money launderer, cleaning dirty money for drug smugglers operating in the Caribbean – then did time in jail.

Fast forward to last week. Mr Rijock, 59, now a picture of respectability, issued a stern warning to 320 delegates at a Singapore banking conference on financial crime.

He said he later briefed Singapore government officials.

Now a sought-after consultant on financial crime, Mr Rijock warned his audience that attempts by “imaginative people” to launder money are not confined to financial institutions.

They can also occur via apparently legitimate businesses.

“Money launderers hide right in the middle of legitimate business transactions, using international trade to disguise huge transactions.”

He used as illustration an imaginary South-east Asia drug figure with millions of dollars in drug profits to be sent to his boss in Colombia.

“He could set up a small import-export firm in Singapore, then set up a bogus factory in a country near where he wants to send the money, like Venezuela.”

Launderers may opt for the cover of shipping high-tech items with highly variable prices, he said.

For instance, some computer chips are cheap but others are worth \$500,000 if used for a space shuttle.

The launderer would use the cover of trading in chips to launder cash.

“They get shipped right under the eyes of bankers,” he said.

Mr Rijock said he used these techniques when laundering drug money in the 1980s.

He is now using that inside knowledge to help clients avoid the dangerous, murky world of terrorist financiers, fraudsters and money launderers.

He works at World Check, a firm based in Britain that provides a database listing names of high-risk individuals and businesses. About 3,000 financial institutions and government agencies in more than 160 countries use the service.

He was invited by the Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS) to be the keynote speaker at the annual Financial Crimes Seminar last Thursday.

He also spoke at other events and briefed high-level government officials, though he declined to specify which departments or agencies.

The briefings focused on money-laundering trends and emerging threats in Asia.

In Singapore, measures taken to combat money laundering include Monetary Authority of Singapore regulations requiring banks to determine just who controls the assets in an account – not just the name on the application form.

## IN PLAIN SIGHT

**“Money launderers hide right in the middle of legitimate business transactions, using international trade to disguise huge transactions.”**

MR KENNETH RIJOCK, on the tactics of money launderers

Earlier this year, the Consortium for Countering the Financing of Terrorism, a joint effort by the Home Affairs Ministry, the ABS and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, came into effect.

It aims to reduce financial crime and prevent terrorist organisations from obtaining and using funds.

For Mr Rijock, fighting financial crime is serious business – but he is quick to draw on his colourful past in his talks.

In the 1980s, he dressed in natty suits and took on the mannerisms of an apparently unassuming commercial lawyer at an international law firm in Miami.

But he also took frequent trips to the picturesque Caribbean island of St Martin to unwind. There, decked out in loud Hawaiian prints, he was the typical American tourist, except that he had not packed his flip-flops – but rather hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash, designated for drug traffickers in the region.

The Vietnam War veteran was a lawyer by day, money launderer by night.

Mr Rijock said he was drawn into the world of money laundering partly because of his opposition to drug laws, which he saw at the time as an intrusion into the citizen’s constitutional right to privacy.

“Of course, I don’t think that any more,” he said, recalling two years spent in a United States prison for racketeering conspiracy and tax offences.

He received a shorter term because he had cooperated with the police.

A former drug user himself, he saw the error of his ways when he saw close-up the horror of drug overdoses.

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