



13 April 2022

LAWASIA STATEMENT ON THE PASSING OF MALATHI DAS, PAST PRESIDENT 2011-2013

All at LAWASIA are shocked and saddened to learn of the sudden loss of Malathi Das, Past President of LAWASIA 2011-2013.

The distinction of serving as LAWASIA's youngest, first woman and first Singaporean president fell to Malathi when she assumed the presidency from Mr Lester Huang in Korea in 2011. Formerly a Council member and a vice president of the Law Society of Singapore, Malathi became a LAWASIA ExCo member in 2003, was elected vice president in 2006 and president-elect in 2009. She brought to her leadership of LAWASIA a particular focus on the rights of families and children, playing a significant role in the development and promulgation of the LAWASIA Siem Reap Principles and Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Equally, she redeveloped a LAWASIA presence at the United Nations, representing it at several meetings in Geneva. Malathi inspired LAWASIA to draw attention to the role the legal profession plays in supporting the UN Guiding Principles in Business and Human Rights.

Janet Neville, who was Secretary-General during Malathi's presidential term, said that Malathi would "always hold a special place in LAWASIA hearts", describing her as "a diminutive woman but with a very big footprint".

The members of the current LAWASIA ExCo who knew and worked with Malathi have articulated their immediate sorrow on learning of this news, as have many of her former ExCo colleagues. Malathi was much-respected by all those she encountered at LAWASIA and amongst the wider international profession.

A cross-section of tributes is set out below.

I knew Malathi from the first moment she became involved with LAWASIA through her mentor, the late Singaporean legal luminary, Palakrishnan SC. Pala was properly keen to introduce a then young Mal to the international profession and how perspicacious he was, as she quickly went on to become a LAWASIA leading light and notably, its first female president. In addition to her busy legal practice, Malathi was tireless in her devotion to the wider legal community and especially to continuing legal education. Her friendly manner along with an inclusive and straightforward

approach broke through numerous barriers and it may not be an exaggeration to suggest that she embodied the principles the LAWASIA has held dear for all of its existence. Her kindness and generosity were legendary but perhaps eclipsed by her keen legal acumen and an admirable work ethic. It was an honour to work by her side and to share many unique and wonderful LAWASIA experiences over many years. I am deeply saddened by her untimely death.

Janet Neville (Australia)

LAWASIA Secretary General 2001-2016

When we look back at the colour and richness that Malathi endowed on each of us, we will be thankful for having her as a friend.

As lawyers, we spent many hours together, in LAWASIA and at the International Association of Practising Lawyers, pursuing opportunities, and defending frontiers of the rule of law. Her contributions to the understanding and enhancement of the rights of women and children particularly stand out, and I considered it a personal privilege and honour to have handed the Presidency of Law Asia to Malathi in 2011, who served as the first woman to be President with distinction and dedication. Rule 2 of the International Code of Ethics of the International Bar Association reads: "Lawyers shall at all times maintain the honour and dignity of their profession." Malathi has certainly performed this demanding order, with distinction.

For me, Malathi brought personable charm and warm smiles, always ready to assist; she had effusive knowledge in many subjects, no doubt fuelled by her incessant and inquisitive mind, and observant eye, and wisdom acquired through her fondness for reading and a love of books; she brought to me additional meaning to enjoying food we shared, with vivid descriptions of spices and textures that her delicate palate was capable of. As a friend, Malathi was most ready to go out of her way for me, say when she took time out of a hectic schedule to purposely travel to Hong Kong to attend my son's wedding, and we looked fondly at the train ride she took to accompany my wife Mary and me from Geneva to Milan to enjoy dinner together, only for her to go all the way back to Geneva on the next day.

Malathi always seemed to have so much to do, and - as we now know better - so little time in which to do it. She could never know idleness or boredom. Yet, she always kept space and time for her friendships, and the privacy of her family whom she loved and cared for.

We shall all find our ways in which to express our thoughts of Malathi as we say farewell and mourn at her passing. I recall the words of a Greek poet: "Those whom the Gods love most, die young".

Lester Huang (Hong Kong SAR)

Past President, LAWASIA 2009-2011

LAWASIA has lost a stalwart, and I have lost a friend. I had the honour and pleasure to have served with Mal on the executive committee of LAWASIA, and she was an inspiration to work with. Her Presidency of LAWASIA will be remembered as one of the high points for LAWASIA.

Christopher Leong (Malaysia)

Past President, LAWASIA 2017-2019

Mal was a beacon of light for LAWASIA. She guided and inspired those around her, and I was privileged and honoured to have served under her immense leadership as the first female President of LAWASIA. Mal had a ginormous heart and an infectious personality. I am deeply saddened to have lost a good friend. You will always be remembered by your LAWASIA family.

Yap Teong Liang (Singapore)

Vice President of LAWASIA

Chair of the LAWASIA Family Law and Family Rights Committee

Malathi Das was a leader extraordinaire who served the mission of the Law Society of Singapore passionately and purposefully. After years of dedicated service on Council, she stepped up to serve as Vice President and subsequently served as Singapore's first LAWASIA President. She was a key architect behind the setting up of the Law Soc Pro Bono arm of the Society which strengthened the Law Society's mission of access to justice. To borrow the description of an NUS (Alumni) Law Link cover story piece on her, Malathi was a "Woman with A Mission".

In the final analysis, what I will remember best and most of my law school classmate and friend, Mal, was someone chirpy and enthusiastic, optimistic, and positive, diplomatic and driven, wise and warm and most indelibly, an incredibly kind and generous soul. Rest In Peace, Mal.

Gregory Vijayendran (Singapore)

Executive Committee Member, LAWASIA

Immediate Past President, The Law Society of Singapore

Other tributes have flowed from virtually all living Past-Presidents and current ExCo members of LAWASIA, together with former Secretary-General Michael Tidball and current Secretary-General (and former president) Dr Gordon Hughes AM.

The LAWASIA community has lost a dear friend and a staunch supporter. We are truly grateful to have benefited from Malathi's leadership and encouragement over a long period of time, and I

place on record our profound esteem for her vision for LAWASIA which has gone on to influence those who have followed her.

At LAWASIA, we honour her memory not only with the great respect that she deserves, but also with the deep affection that she inspired.

Melissa Pang

President, LAWASIA



In happy times. LAWASIA President Malathi Das (centre) in Tokyo in 2013, with Secretary-General Janet Neville and Vice President Chris Leong.