

The Malacca Portuguese

# SAVING OUR CULTURE & TRADITIONS



*Nos Sa Jenti, Nos Sa Tradisang*  
(My Community, My Traditions)

Joseph Sta Maria

The Malacca Portuguese

For Tun Mahathir  
with Love

Joseph 25/7/22

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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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## **Saving Our Culture and Traditions**

*Nos Sa Jenti, No Se Tradisang*  
(My Community, My Traditions)

First Edition, 2022

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The Fortaleza de Malaca in 1635

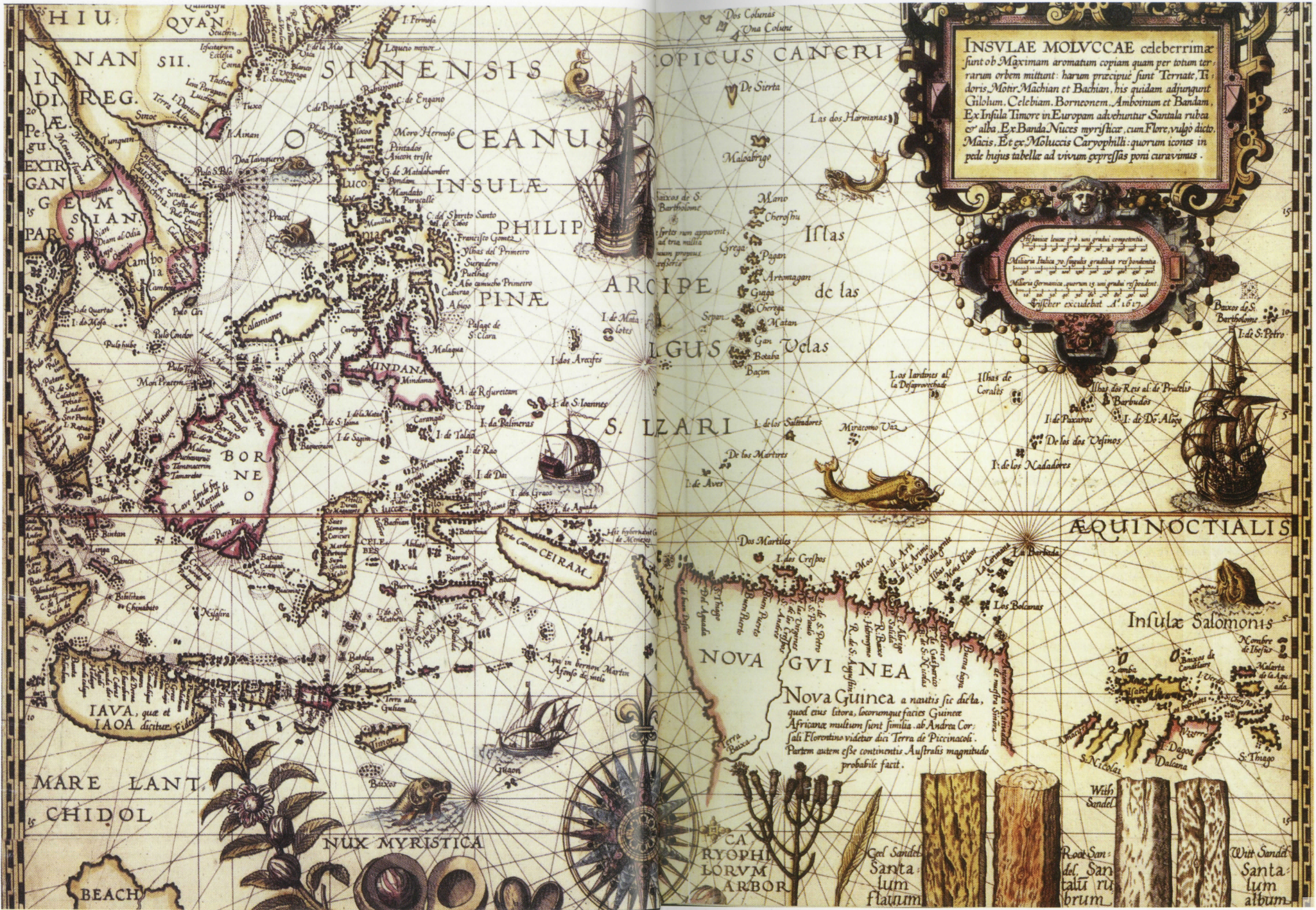
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Detail of a world map by Diogo Ribeiro, *Cosmographo de Su Maj. anno de 1529*.

The original map is kept in the *Großherzoglichen Bibliothek* in Weimar (Germany).



Map of South East Asia by Petrus Plancius, 1594

## DEDICATION

This collection of stories and reflections are lovingly dedicated to a baby girl and three grand men.

It is in the memory of my great-great grandfather, Joaquim Sta Maria, my great-grandfather Emmanuel Sta Maria, my grandfather Bernard Sta Maria (Senior) and Dona Catherina Sta Maria.

I never had the chance to meet them.

The three grand old men departed long before I was born while my first child, Dona Catherina, passed away on the day of her birth.

To my late parents Donald Sta Maria and Jenny Sta Maria (Theseira), thank you for the love showered on me and my family. You will always be in my heart.

Joseph Sta Maria



## FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure, pride and reverence that I write this brief introduction for the book of my friend Mr. Joseph Sta Maria, whom I have known for several years, and with whom I have shared the effort to go ahead with the first, second and third Asian Portuguese Community Conferences.



*Picture by Alfredo Cunha*

This initiative has been decisively committed to the promotion and defense of the historical, linguistic, religious, cultural, folkloric and gastronomic heritage of the Luso-descendant communities not only in Malacca, but in all of Malaysia, as well as from Asia and all around the Indian Ocean.

I have visited Malaysia many times and obviously Malacca as well as all the countries of Asia and around the Indian Ocean, where our communities persist with that admirable courage, persistence, love, faith and pride of their ancestors, in not letting their roots disappear, against the absentia, ignorance and indifference almost constant from the leaders of the Motherland.

I have been from Mozambique to Zanzibar, Mombasa Malindi, Lamu, Mogadishu, Omen, Ormuz, India (Goa, Calcutta), Sri Lanka, Bangladesh (Jessore, Chittagong, Dhaka), Burma, Thailand, Indonesia (Flores, Ende, Sika, Larantuka), East Timor, Malaysia, Singapore, Macau, China, Australia, with the exception of Japan, where I have never been, I took contact not only with our history, our monumental landmarks (fortresses, churches...), but above all with our people, our descendants, the people who have been forgotten for so long by the vast majority of the Portuguese people!

As a descendant of the Sequeira (Sequeira was the first to arrive in Malacca in 1509), the Almeida (the first Viceroy of India was Dom Francisco de Almeida), the Cabral, the Magalhães, the Távora, the Azevedo, the Barros, the Teixeira and many others, I am proud that many of my greatest ones have traversed the seas and oceans, facing the "Adamastores", that some have been Viceroys and Governors in Goa and that most of them died away from their land, in the defense of Portugal.

It was a time when our greatest, true servants of the public service and, therefore, of the State, took with them children and nephews who died fighting in defense of the Honour of their Homeland and of their name.

Dom Francisco de Almeida lost during his viceroyalty, his son Dom Lourenço in a naval battle in Diu. Dom Afonso De Albuquerque lost two or three of his six nephews, whilst he was the Governor. And Dom João de Castro, as Viceroy, lost his son Dom Miguel who died in Malacca, whilst being Captain-Major of the Malacca Fortress, "A Famosa", built by Dom Afonso de Albuquerque. His tomb is still there inside São Paulo's church in Malacca. And it is not by chance that there are avenues and streets in the Portuguese Settlement of Malacca, have the names of Eredia, Sequeira, Albuquerque, Teixeira...

It is with emotion and nostalgia that I remember my presence in that neighborhood, during the popular "Festa de São Pedro", held in reverence of the patron saint of fishermen on June 29 each year.

There I had the great honour of being chosen to be part of the jury to award the best decorated fishing boats of our descendants.

We could do so much in the name of our ancestors!

And why not grant them the Portuguese citizenship of their ancestors? The Portuguese descendants deserve it, they who fought so hard and honoured Portugal for centuries!

The Luso-descendant communities in the world, and obviously those in Asia as well, deserve our full respect and deep admiration because, although forgotten for centuries, they never stopped loving Portugal and always cherished and preserved their Portuguese heritage!

The Kristang, Papiamento or Indo-Portuguese are and should always be our pride. For that and much, much more, I have so much love, respect and affection for all our communities. But it is not enough. As Portuguese, we should always demonstrate it with attitudes and actions.

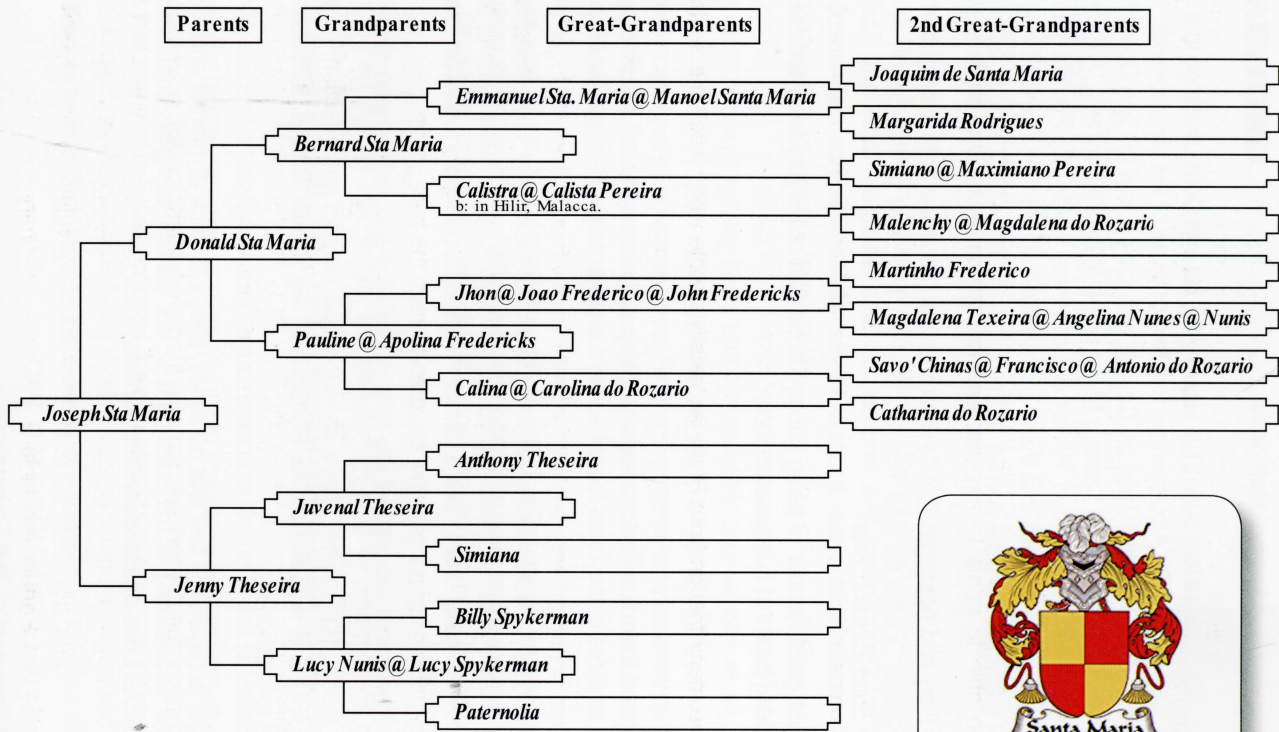
I urge Portugal to regain the last four centuries, filled with lack of interest and support (with very few exceptions) of the safeguard of our culture so rightly protected and maintained by the Luso-descendant communities.

**Prof. Fernando de La Vieter Nobre M.D. PhD**

Founder and President of AML Foundation

Portugal

**Ancestors of Joseph Sta Maria**



Researched & Compiled by:  
Benedict Stephen Manen-Basnayake



## INTRODUCTION

In one of my interactions on social media, I was asked if I could trace my ancestral home in Portugal. I said I could not but despite this, I was still proud of my Portuguese identity.

While most members of Malaysia's main communities, the Malays, Chinese and Indians, can identify the place of their ancestors' origins - from the Indonesian archipelago, mainland China and the Indian subcontinent - people of my community would not be able to relate to any localities in Portugal, even though they regard themselves as Malacca Portuguese.

And unlike people of the three communities, some of whom still have close contacts with their relatives in Indonesia, China and India, Malacca Portuguese cannot track back their links to Portugal. They can only rely on their surnames and their cultural practices to hold on to their connection to the Iberian nation.

But they have many friends from Portugal, mostly people who visited the settlement and were amazed to find out about a community which keeps its Portuguese culture and ancient traditions alive, so far away from home.

As for me, I am honoured and thankful for having many friends from Portugal, people whom I became acquainted with during my journey of searching, appreciating and preserving my heritage over the past decades. My two visits to Portugal not only helped me gain a better understanding of the place where my ancestors came from but also cherish the friendships of people who are keen to keep the connection.

In his book, *The Portuguese in Malacca During the Dutch Period*, W.H. Smith wrote that from 1641 onwards “*Malacca disappeared officially from the Portuguese political history, but this could not be the end of the story for there remained in the city a large group of Portuguese, the descendants of whom still exist today.*”

Perhaps the main reason for this was the then Portuguese policy of encouraging mixed marriages with locals in places where they colonised. The Portuguese rulers of that era believed that intermarriages were one of the primary methods of cultural integration. This approach created a new breed of people, retaining the behaviour and characteristics of the Portuguese, including music and culinary practices.



Unlike other European colonists, Portugal rewarded its men who married locals. As for the children of such unions, King Joao III (John III also known as The Pious) decreed that they should be honoured with pride. In respect of this, the Portuguese introduced the concept of godparents in the region. Godparents accept these children as their very own and have the obligation to act like real parents.

Malacca is a cultural melting pot, where traders from all over the world came to trade. It was known as “The Venice of East” where 84 languages were spoken. With a population of 100,000 people, Malacca flourished and emerged as a great city. The accounts of two 16th century researchers, Jesuit missionary Luis Frois and writer and cartographer Godinho de Eredia, described what Malacca was in those days.

Luis Frois, noted that the city was *“richer than Venice because much gold, silver, precious stones, amber, ivory, silk, pepper, clove, and all types of merchandise can be found in abundance.”* He also mentioned the varieties of fruits that were found in Malacca and *“one was called the Durian, in the opinion of anybody who came to Malacca, is one of the best fruits created by God.”*

Today, more than five centuries later, Malacca’s population is 932,700 (as of 2020). Among the three major races of people in Malacca, Malays form the majority, while the Chinese and Indians are the other two main ethnic groups. The Malacca Portuguese is a tiny minority in comparison, with an estimated population of less than five thousand.

Although many prominent Portuguese have visited Malacca to promote better cultural, commercial, educational and tourism links, much more needs to be done to fortify the re-established connection. For example, a twin city agreement was signed between Malacca and Lisbon in 1984. Among other things, it was meant to explore the rich potential in the development of tourism between the two countries and by extension, European nations and Malaysia.

More recently though, there have been some positive developments, among which is Portugal’s keen interest in setting up an Honorary Consulate in Malacca. Currently, the Portuguese Ambassador in Thailand also serves as envoy to Malaysia.

The front cover of this book is adorned with the images of my maternal grandparents against the backdrop of a 16th Century Portuguese vessel. It signifies the story of my community, the journey that my ancestors took in such ships and landed here in Malacca where they created a new race of people from inter marriages with the local community. My grandparents are a symbol of the generations which exist till today.

I am thankful to all my friends for their support in this endeavour, particularly M.Veera Pandiyan, for his help in editing and making valuable suggestions towards the compiling of this book and Lawrence Theseira for his tireless efforts in design, type setting and post production.

Above all, I wish to record my sincere appreciation to Prof. Fernando de La Vieter Nobre, the founding Father of AMI who provided me with the encouragement and support needed to publish this book. To all those who have given a helping hand in one way or another, I say Muito Grande Merseh.

Thank you.

Joseph Sta Maria



AGREEMENT OF TWINNING BETWEEN THE CITIES OFLISBON AND MALACCA

The cities of Lisbon and Malacca; taking into consideration the historical and cultural ties and the bonds of friendship that unite their two peoples; considering their common wish to tighten the said ties and bonds through cooperation in all initiatives aiming to better their peoples' welfare and the development of their relations; have decided to sign an agreement by which the two will be considered twin cities.

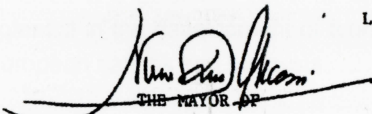
To implement this agreement, the City Council of Lisbon and the City Council of Malacca will put into action a full program of cultural, social, educational, informative and turistic exchange in order to further their knowledge of the culture of each other's people. Both City Councils shall also cooperate in each other's city development programs.

Towards the implementation of these aims and of each separate program Permanent Commissions shall be named.

A program of actions to take place in each city shall be prepared.

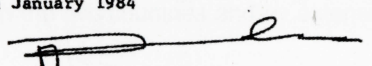
Further to the actions included in the aforesaid programs, each city will make an effort to include the other in every social and cultural opportunity that may take place so as to deepen the friendship and cooperation relations now started.

Lisbon, 19 th January 1984



THE MAYOR OF

LISBON



THE PRESIDENT OF  
MALACCA MUNICIPALITY

ACORDO DE GEMINAÇÃO  
ENTRE  
AS CIDADES DE LISBOA E MALACA

As cidades de Lisboa e Malaca, considerando os seculares laços históricos, culturais e de amizade que unem os seus povos e a comprovada vontade de ambas as partes de os reforçar colaborando em todas as acções que, levadas a cabo, se destinem a elevar o bem estar dos seus cidadãos e a desenvolver as suas relações, decidem assinar um acordo de geminação entre elas.

Para pôr em prática esse acordo, a Câmara Municipal de Lisboa e a Câmara Municipal da cidade de Malaca, desenvolverão todo um programa de intercâmbio cultural, social, educativo, informativo e turístico, para difusão recíproca da cultura dos dois povos e cooperarão em programas de desenvolvimento municipal em ambas as cidades.

Para a prossecução destes fins e para a realização de cada programa sectorial serão nomeadas as respectivas comissões permanentes.

Será estabelecido um programa de actividades a realizar em ambas as cidades, com periodicidade a determinar.

Sem prejuízo dessas actividades programadas, as duas cidades comprometem-se a aproveitar todas as oportunidades que se ofereçam para a realização de manifestações culturais e sociais que aprofundem as relações de amizade e cooperação agora firmadas.

Cidade de Lisboa, em 19 de Janeiro de 1984

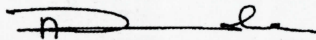
O PRESIDENTE

DA CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE LISBOA

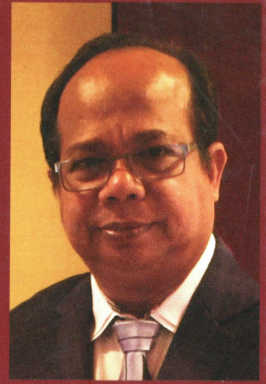


O PRESIDENTE

DA CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE MALACA



Joseph Sta Maria's involvement in social activities began when he was still a teenager. He was very much influenced by the work of his late brother Bernard Sta Maria, the first elected representative from the Malacca Portuguese community.



In 1987, the leadership of the Malacca Portuguese community appointed Joseph to lead a special committee to resolve a dispute over land titles faced by residents of the Portuguese Settlement in Malacca, Malaysia.

The Land Action Committee (LAC) succeeded in its objectives with the settlement, the country's sole Portuguese village, being listed as a 'Preservation and Conservation' site.

In recognition of his services to the Malacca state government and the Portuguese community, he was made a Justice of Peace (JP) in 2012. The award was conferred by His Excellency the Governor of Malacca.

Joseph Sta Maria also served as a Malacca Historic City councillor in 2017.

In 2014, he led a large delegation of the Malacca Portuguese community to Timor Leste for the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) conference. He played a crucial role in the re-connection between Malacca and several Portuguese-linked communities spread out across Asia.

He has frequently travelled to these Portuguese Asian communities to keep the nexus and strengthen the Portuguese community's cultural and historical ties.

In 2016, he led a Malacca Portuguese delegation of 36 people to Vatican City to witness the official appointment of Malaysia's first ever Cardinal by Pope Francis.

Joseph Sta Maria is also the Founder and Organising Chairman of the 1st and 2nd Asian Portuguese Community Conference in Malacca - in 2016 and 2019.

He has written and published two books – *Undi Nos By Di Aki* (Where Do We Go From Here in 1994) and *Prominent People in the Malacca Portuguese Community* - a reproduction of a speech delivered in the campaign for Malacca to be listed a UNESCO site.

### *Saving Our Culture & Traditions*

*This is a story of my community and my traditions, or in my native language, Nos sa Jenti Nos sa Tradisang. The fear of losing one's identity is real. If we fail to recognise this, we will fail in our duties as members of our community.*

*Ignoring this reality will result in the community's eventual disintegration and disappearance or being assimilated into other communal groups. A community can only claim to be one if it upholds a culture, traditions and a language which it can proudly call its own.*

*This book is written with the foremost aim of reminding my community how important culture and traditions are and how they keep us together.*

*Joseph Sta Maria*