



Toni Kasim

Many Shades of Good
A Tribute

Edited by Kua Kia Soong

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INDONESIA
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Jon
Kasim

Many Shades of Good

A Tribute

Edited by Kua Kia Soong



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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	7
About Toni Kasim	8
Introduction by Kua Kia Soong: A many splendoured being	10
TRIBUTES BY TONI'S FAMILY	17
Aishah Kasim: If there's any living left undone	18
Aminah Bee Mohd. Kasim: So eloquent, so knowledgeable	22
Azmah binti Daud: The best auntie in the whole world	27
TRIBUTES BY FRIENDS	31
Paul Barter: The Toni I loved	32
Shanon Shah: Finishing each other's sentences	38
Kathy Rowland: Many shades of good	43
Anne Munro-Kua: Facilitating magic	45
Yeoh Seng Guan: Like a star	53
JJ Ray: Toni's passion for life	56
Anandhi Gopinath: She gave so many people a voice	59
Ziad Haider: Her friends were family	63
Julian Lee: An inspiration to young activists	65
Helen Barter: Toni set high standards	68
David Chalmers: The young Toni I knew	70
Arutchelvam: A great activist with remarkable character	71
Kohila Yanasekaran: Tireless activist and caring person	73
Pang Khee Teik: Toni the expert hugger	74
Julian Jayaseelan: Someone I could talk to	76
Lina Tan Suan Jeu: Toni the empowering schoolgirl	77
Vernon Adrian Emuang: She refused to be a victim	79
Jerome Kugan: City of mud	81
Jac SM Kee: I still keep bumping into you	84
Shahril Nizam Ahmad: The Lady Who Moved Mountains	86
Azwan Ismail: Angel with rainbow wings	88
Clarissa Ai Ling Lee: A soul mate to confide in	91
Marie Tan Kiak Li: She touched lives near and far	91
Bernice Chauly: A person you don't ever forget	93
Victoria Cattoni: Sweaty girls who'd done well	94
Helen Crawford: An amazing teacher and story teller	95
Mark Choo: The gratitude of being	96
Kien Kiong: Your smile will help me through	97

Kakiseni: An indelible mark on many lives	98
Jacqueline Ann Surin: She made me feel empowered	101
Rahal Saeed: Warm, affectionate, intelligent	102
Suryani Senja Alias: Toni's left a long imprint	103
TRIBUTES BY ORGANISATIONS	105
Centre for Independent Journalism: The best Prime Minister Malaysia never had	106
Women's Aid Organisation: A hard act to follow	107
Green Left: She took no shit from anyone	108
Forum Asia: A loss to the human rights movement	110
Democratic Action party: Toni made Malaysia a better place	112
A VIGNETTE OF TONI	113
Sonia Randhawan: Toni & Sonia, Fast forwarding Nigel	114
TONI IN HER OWN WRITE	121
Where muftis fear to tread	122
Aliran Monthly interview	125
Malay Mail interview	130
TONI LIVES!	132

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My apologies to the authors for any pieces which have been lost in transcription or for any lapses in editing.

ABOUT TONI, 1966 - 2008

ZAITUN MOHAMED KASIM, OR TONI as she preferred to be known, was born in Ipoh and completed her formal education at Flinders University where she received her degree in economics and computer studies. It was during her time in Australia that her interest in human rights issues developed and she continued this work upon returning to Malaysia.

Toni was involved in a broad array of organisations, campaigns and communities in various capacities including as trainer, consultant, resource person, spokesperson, manager, and organizer. Her first significant position upon returning to Malaysia was that of manager of All Women's Action Society. Throughout her time as an activist, Toni was especially concerned with women's rights and women's access to both the public sphere and resources and opportunities.

She firmly believed in the principles of justice and equality for all, regardless of differences in gender, race, religion, sexualities, disabilities and access to wealth and resources.

Her commitment to eradicating discrimination was evident from the diversity of issues and communities in which she worked. These included: poverty alleviation during her time with Community Aid Abroad; land issues with the United Nations Development Programme; social issues affecting Muslim communities; concerns related to the environment, equitable transportation, sustainable development and disaster management; health issues with vulnerable groups such as sex workers and transgender communities.

Toni Kasim devoted a large part of her life making the connections between needs for institutional and social change with the lived realities of everyday people. She firmly believed that it is important to address any issue in its entirety. This meant understanding that basic rights belong to every person and transcends identity, geographical or economic boundaries, and that each individual concern is related to the larger society that we all share and inhabit.

She demonstrated this by advocating the rights of migrants and refugees both within and outside Malaysia. She provided immediate support to affected groups of people during situations of need, having volunteered a significant amount of time and resources helping violence against women survivors and providing help during the tsunami crisis in Aceh.

At the same time, Toni Kasim also believed in raising awareness and capacity building for greater and long lasting change. At the heart of her fight for common justice lay a conviction in gender equality. She consistently advocated reform in laws, policies and government-led services that discriminated against women in different ways, and held key positions in various women's rights organisations and initiatives.

Toni Kasim ran as the first independent women's parliamentary candidate in the 1999 General Elections on a gender platform. Instead of narrowing her advocacy to political party priorities, Toni Kasim raised issues that reverberated across communities and constituents, such as discriminatory laws, health issues, employment and wealth distribution.

A tireless leader, Toni Kasim devoted much of her life advancing the rights of diverse communities in Malaysia, and no one's reality was too marginal to be captured in her advocacy for collective justice.

*Women's Candidate Initiative

INTRODUCTION

TONI KASIM – A MANY SPLENDURED BEING

By Kua Kia Soong,
SUARAM director

I DECIDED TO UNDERTAKE this project of compiling a tribute to Toni, our beloved comrade, friend and sister, as her anniversary loomed. I felt I hadn't properly grieved over her passing since her illness had occupied us in a way that didn't leave much space for grieving.

Many of us did not get a chance to say a proper goodbye to her and the ramifications of that can be seen in Arul's piece. Still, Toni was mortal and the illness had left her devastated and weak. She was not in a state to accept streams of visitors and well-wishers during those harrowing last days, so nobody need feel slighted in any way - Toni loved us all unconditionally.

The Entire Spectrum of our Community

Her memorial at the Annexe, Central Market soon after her passing left us in no doubt that Toni had friends and admirers from the entire spectrum of our community, irrespective of age, gender, occupation, religion, ethnicity or sexuality.

SUARAM, the human rights organization to which Toni belonged, had raised some funds for the treatment of her illness and we thought that a "*Tribute to Toni*" by all her friends would be a fitting contribution to her memory.

But not one single contribution alone would be enough to capture the qualities, the energy, the love, the humour, the witticism, the joy, the humanity, the activism, the diversity that Toni embodied. She was so many things to so many people...a many splendoured being, you could say.

"A little clichéd maybe, Soong?" I can hear Toni's cheeky riposte.