

MEDIA RELEASE

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Singapore Women's Hall of Fame welcomes 14 new honourees

The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) will mark International Women's Day 2016 by inducting 14 honourees to the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame.

The 14 women comprise two Supreme Court judges, six sportswomen, two food personalities, a diplomat, an activist/advocate, a medical aid worker, and a community/social worker. ***(See Addenda A for the list of honourees and summaries of their achievements, and Addenda B for the comments of some of them on being inducted.)***

They will be inducted to the Hall of Fame at a gala dinner on 18 March where Mrs Mary Tan, SCWO's Patron, will present them each with The Flame, a trophy that symbolizes the vitality of the women in the Hall of Fame and the torch of inspiration that is passed from one generation to another.

The Singapore Women's Hall of Fame (SWHF) was launched in 2014 to recognise and celebrate the many contributions of women to Singapore's development, and to share the stories of these outstanding women so as to inspire others, especially younger Singaporeans. In the first year 108 women were honoured, and in 2015 there were 11.

Each year, a short-list of candidates for induction is drawn up by the Resource Panel, assisted by SCWO's team of researchers. The Selection Panel, chaired by Ambassador-at-Large Professor Tommy Koh, then decides on those to be inducted.

In his foreword in the 2016 SWHF commemorative booklet, Prof Koh notes that the Hall of Fame is already having the desired impact of inspiring others, especially the young.

At the end of 2015, an exhibition organised by SWHF and the National Museum (titled *A Salute to The Pioneering Women of Singapore*) proved so popular that its scheduled run of five weeks was extended to 11 weeks. And students who attended SWHF talks and mini exhibitions at their schools spoke of how they were inspired to 'step out of my comfort zone and do things to make a difference to others', as one Secondary Two student put it.

Prof Koh added that in identifying the women to be inducted, the Resource and Selection Panels consider not just their achievements as individuals but also, where applicable, their contributions as team members. While the exemplary work and achievements of most of the honourees was in or for Singapore, some are honoured for having made a difference to lives and societies elsewhere.

"Singapore is a global city and it is right that our people are applying their talent, vision and passion as good global citizens to make this a better world," Prof Koh said.

In his foreword, Michael Zink, Head of ASEAN and Citi Country Office, Singapore, said Citi was proud and honoured to be, for the third year running, the Presenting Sponsor of SWHF. The lives and stories of the women demonstrate that "with persistent focus, commitment and enthusiasm, dreams can indeed be transformed into reality", he said.

Mr Zink added that as diversity and inclusion are prominent in the financial institution's culture, Citi's partnership with SCWO on the Hall of Fame gives it the opportunity to "align our diversity efforts and strengthen the impact of our strategy, programmes and performance".

SCWO President Malathi Das in her foreword paid tribute to the honourees in a poem. "Look in the mirror, And see what we see, A talented, magnificent and uplifting woman, Who has come so far, And has achieved so much," she writes.

The stories of the 119 women already in the Hall of Fame can be found on the SWHF website (swhf.sg). The profiles of this year's 14 honourees will soon be added. Also on the website are:

- Milestones, a timeline of the policies and laws affecting women in Singapore and of the achievements and contributions of individual women
- The Orchid Garden, a space where members of the public can pay tribute to the important women in their lives. Also featured here are the recipients of the Jamiyah Exemplary Mother Award and Great Women of Our Time Awards. Soon to be added are the tributes penned by visitors to the 'A Salute to the Pioneering Women of Singapore' exhibition held at the National Museum from Nov 2015 to January 2016.

The 2016 International Women's Day gala dinner and SWHF Induction Ceremony will be held at the Tower Ballroom, Shangrila Hotel, on Friday 18 March 2016. Guests will include women parliamentarians, foreign diplomats, and senior civil servants, past SWHF inductees, and representatives of SCWO's member organisations.



About SCWO

The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) is the national coordinating body of women's organisations in Singapore. Our **60 member organisations represent more than 600,000 women in Singapore**. Incorporated in March 1980, the SCWO seeks to bring together various women's organisations, clubs, committees, groups, and women leaders, with the goal of creating a national movement. It seeks to promote the ideals of 'Equal Space, Equal Voice and Equal Worth' for women in Singapore.

Our services include **The Star Shelter**, a temporary refuge survivors of domestic abuse, **Maintenance Support Central**, a one-stop centre that provides services for the effective enforcement of maintenance orders, **Legal Clinics** that provide both Civil Law and Muslim Law Legal Clinics and an **IT Hub**, a training centre run by volunteers for women and their family members to be IT connected and updated.

Other initiatives include the **Singapore Women's Hall of Fame**, which celebrates the outstanding women who have made, or are making an impact on our nation, **BoardAgender**, a forum to create greater awareness and understanding of the benefits of gender balanced businesses and the **Women's Register**, a platform for Networking, Education and Inspiration.

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Singapore Women's Hall of Fame: The Honourees of 2016

MAY WONG

Pioneer community worker and tireless fund-raiser

Born 1899 Died 1989

Category: Community / Social work



May Wong, also known as Mrs S K Wong, was a pioneer community worker and a tireless fund-raiser. She was the longest-serving president of the Chinese Women's Association (CWA), leading the organisation from 1949 till her death in 1989 at age 90. In 1978, when May was nearly 80 years old, the CWA took over the running of the Henderson Senior Citizens' Home. Together with CWA treasurer Violet Wong, also in her 70s, May supervised the running of the home for the next 11 years. Soon after US-born May moved to Singapore in 1930 with her banker husband, she started serving on the committee running Po Leung Kuk, a home for girls and women rescued from the vice trade. May was awarded the Member of the British Empire Medal in 1937 and the Pingat Bakti Masyarakat (PBM) in 1977.

ALICE EDITH WILHELMINA PENNEFATHER
A pioneering and outstanding sportswoman
Born 1903 Died 1983

Category: Sports



A kiss from husband Launcelot on their diamond anniversary in 1979

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Alice Edith Wilhemina Patterson, better known as Alice Pennefather, was one of the most outstanding sportswomen of her time. In 1931, when she was 28 years old, she became Singapore's first women's singles badminton champion. She continued to play competitive badminton until the early 1950s, winning many singles, doubles and mixed doubles events in championships in Singapore and Malaya. She also excelled at tennis and hockey. In 1936 Alice became the first non-European woman tennis champion since the women's singles event was started in 1933, and she also won the title in the next two years. Meanwhile, she played a pivotal role in building the Girls' Sports Club's hockey team into one of the leading teams in Singapore.

TAN CHENG HIONG

Pioneer champion of women's rights

Born 1904 Died 1999

Category: Advocacy / Activism



Tan Cheng Hiong (second from right) with her family

Tan Cheng Hiong, better known after her marriage in 1931 as Mrs George Lee, was the first president of the Singapore Council of Women (SCW), the women's group in the 1950s that lobbied for polygamy to be banned. Cheng Hiong turned the pain of learning that she was in a polygamous marriage into a campaign for monogamy. Polygamy became illegal when the Women's Charter was passed in 1961. Earlier, soon after she married industrialist George Lee, she noticed the agony of women workers with bound feet who had to carry heavy sheets of rubber up and down stairs at the family's Lee Rubber Factory. She convinced her husband to lighten their load by installing pulleys. Cheng Hiong was SCW president from 1952 to 1959 and its vice president till it was deregistered in 1971.

TAN YOON YIN

Singapore's first lady of netball

Born 1929

Category: Sports



Source: Netball Singapore

When Tan Yoon Yin went to the Registry of Societies in 1962 to set up the Singapore Women's Netball Association, the man who handled her application asked: "Do you think it will survive or not?" Yoon Yin replied: "I don't care. I'm trying." Netball Singapore, as it is now known, has not only survived; it has thrived, thanks to Yoon Yin. She got 23 netball clubs to sign up as members of the association, and she used her own money to buy manuals on how to coach netball teams and umpire matches. She started an umpiring course, and organised tournaments. To help fund the association, she and her netball girls baked and sold cookies to the spectators at their games. She also pushed for netball to be part of the Education Ministry's physical education curriculum.

ELEANOR CLUNIES-ROSS

Pioneering athlete

Born 1934

Category: Sports



Eleanor Ann Clunies-Ross was a sprint champion in the early 1950s who made a mark in Singapore's sporting history with her raw talent and outstanding performance. Her talent was discovered when she was entered, at the last minute, for the 100-yard sprint at the 1951 interschool athletics championships. Eleanor borrowed a pair of shorts from her friend and ran in bare feet. She easily won the heat and the next day at the finals smashed the schoolgirls' record of 13.6s with her timing of 12.4s. In 1952 she twice qualified for the Olympics but was not selected for the Singapore contingent. Undeterred she pressed on and tried other events – and in her debut attempt at the long jump she bettered the record by six inches.

MARY BEATRICE KLASS

Pioneering athlete

Born 1935

Category: Sports



Mary Beatrice Klass was in 1954 one of the two fastest women in Asia. Representing Singapore at the Asian Games in Manila, the 19-year-old tied with crowd favourite Japanese sprinter Atsuko Nambu at 12.5s in the 100-metre race. She stunned everyone with her performance because in the semi-finals Atsuko had beaten her by a good three yards.

Race officials, however, decided to award the gold to Atsuko. In 1956, Mary represented Singapore in the 100m and 200m events at the Olympics. Mary shattered many records during her five years of competitive running. She retired when she was just 22 years old because she got tired of having to run without any real competition. After her retirement from athletics, she played netball and hockey for the Girls' Sports Club.

JANET JESUDASON
Pioneering athlete
Born 1936

Category: Sports



Janet Jesudason was a pioneer athlete who represented Singapore at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, one of just two women in the Singapore contingent. Dubbed 'Speedy Gonzales' by her Katong Convent classmates, she saw much success at inter-school athletic meets during the early 1950s. She became a track star in 1955 when she clocked 12.1s for her 100-yard heat at the first secondary schools athletics meet, shattering Olympic sprinter Tang Pui Wah's 4-year-old record. The next year she surprised herself by qualifying for the Melbourne Olympics, and joined Mary Klass in the Singapore contingent. She retired from athletics soon after the Olympics. Now living in Australia, she is a qualified yoga teacher and recently completed a two-year teacher training certification in Vedic chanting in Chennai, India.

GLORIA BECK
Pioneering athlete
Born 1938 Died 2015

Category: Sports



Gloria Beck was a star athlete in Singapore's inter-school competitions in the mid-1950s. At the first secondary schools athletic meet in 1955 she was a multiple winner and record smasher, and the only participant to win medals in three events. She excelled in the 80-metre hurdles, 100-yard sprint, high jump and long jump. Her well-rounded athletic ability led to her being selected to represent Singapore in several events at the 1955 Malayan A.A.A. Championships. Later she joined the Girls' Sports Club, holding honorary posts and playing netball and softball. Gloria died in November 2015 aged 78, shortly after learning she was to be inducted to the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame.

JAYALEKSHMI MOHIDEEN
First female career diplomat
Born 1945

Category: Government



Jayalekshmi (Jaya) Mohideen became Singapore's first female career diplomat in 1989 when she was appointed Ambassador to Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, the European Union and the Holy See. She joined the Foreign Ministry in 1976 on what was meant to be a two-year posting to help lay the organisational foundations for a professional Foreign Service. It became an 18-year career that saw her, amongst other achievements, being knighted by the Dutch Queen. Jaya has also made important contributions in the social services sector, putting in place sound corporate governance policies and processes at MINDS (Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore) as its president from 2003 to 2009. She received the Public Administration Medal in 1981 and the Public Service Star in 2009.

ANG SWEE CHAI

Orthopaedic surgeon and medical aid worker extraordinaire

Born 1948

Category: Health



She was working as an orthopaedic surgeon in London when, in August 1982, an international appeal was made for medical personnel to treat casualties in war-torn Lebanon. Ang Swee Chai, then 33, quit her job and began working in a hospital in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp. In September she witnessed the massacre of hundreds of Palestinian refugees in the camp by Lebanese Phalangist militia. She continued to operate until she and her staff were marched out of the camp at gunpoint. In 1984 Swee Chai and her husband, lawyer and activist Francis Khoo, set up the UK-based charity Medical Aid for Palestinians. In 1987 she received the Star of Palestine for her work and courage in speaking up for Palestinians. Her book ***From Beirut to Jerusalem: A Woman Surgeon with the Palestinians***, published in 1989, has been translated into a dozen languages including Chinese.

LAI SIU CHIU

First woman on the Supreme Court Bench

Born 1948

Category: Law



Source: Supreme Court Singapore

In 1991 a glass ceiling in the Singapore Judiciary was shattered when Lai Siu Chiu was appointed Judicial Commissioner. This led to a change in the standard mode of address in the Supreme Court from the traditional 'My Lord' to the gender-neutral 'Your Honour'. Three years later Siu Chiu became the first woman Supreme Court Judge. In 2015, when the position of Senior Judge was created, she was the only woman among the five former Supreme Court judges who were named Senior Judge. The three-year appointment marked her return following her 2013 retirement after 22 years on the Bench. Apart from her work in the Courts, Siu Chiu has also been active in the social sector, particularly with the Yellow Ribbon Fund (YRF) which administers funds for rehabilitation programmes for ex-offenders.

VIOLET OON

Singapore's food ambassador

Born 1949

Category: Arts/Culture/Entertainment



One of Singapore's best known food personalities, Violet Oon has been just about everything there is to be in the food business – critic, author, publisher, speaker, teacher, television presenter, restaurateur, consultant, and, of course, chef. Her career in food began in 1974, when she was 25 years old, with a food column in *New Nation*. In 1988 the Singapore Tourism Promotion Board sent her to the United States to promote Singapore as a food haven. It was the first of many such trips. In the 1990s she ran a Peranakan restaurant and then several cafes, after which she focused on her food consultancy business. In 2012, together with her two children, she opened *Violet Oon's Kitchen* in Bukit Timah. In 2015 it was renamed *Violet Oon Singapore*, and a second outlet – *National Kitchen by Violet Oon Singapore* - was opened at the National Gallery, with plans to go global.

AZIZA ALI

Pioneer restaurateur and promoter of Malay culture

Born 1950

Category: Category: Arts/Culture/Entertainment



Source: Expat Living Singapore

When Aziza Ali opened her eponymous restaurant along Emerald Hill Road in 1979, she was going where no-one had gone before. ***Aziza's*** was a fine-dining Malay restaurant – an unheard-of concept at that time. And, even more surprising, at its helm was a Malay woman aged just 29. ***Aziza's*** was a success, attracting a wide range of customers including visiting celebrities. The restaurant became a meeting place for the founders of the Singapore Heritage Society. Apart from introducing good Malay food to the world, Aziza also showcased Malay culture, bringing in Malay dancers to perform traditional dances at the restaurant. In 1996, ***Aziza's*** won the Singapore Tourism Board's Best Dining Experience Award. But in 1998 the restaurant closed because of the Asian financial crisis. Aziza now paints, and held exhibitions in 2008 and 2010.

JUDITH PRAKASH

Key figure in Singapore's growth as a global arbitration hub

Born 1951

Category: Law



Source: Supreme Court Singapore

When Singapore set out in 2003 to become an international arbitration hub, Judith Prakash was the first judge appointed to hear arbitration cases brought before the Supreme Court. Widely respected for her expertise in commercial law, particularly shipping matters, Judith was named Judicial Commissioner in 1992 and became a Supreme Court Judge three years later. She was the second woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court Bench. Judith chairs the Law Reform Committee of the Singapore Academy of Law, playing a leading role in the submission of recommendations to the authorities on areas in need of legislation and on the reform of existing laws. She has chaired the Raffles' Girls School Board of Governors since 1996 and was awarded the Public Service Medal in 2005 and, in 2014, the Ministry of Education's Gold Award for Service to Education.

Addenda B

Comments of some of the 2016 honourees on being inducted to the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame

Jayalekshmi Mohideen

First female career diplomat

"It is my honour to be among the Singapore galaxy of women stars; it is a showcase of women's achievements from the early years and from all walks of life. This Hall of Fame should spur our younger generation, and those to come in the future, to strive to achieve the best for our society and country. The Hall of Fame comprises many role models for emulation by younger women."

Ang Swee Chai

Orthopaedic surgeon and medical aid worker extraordinaire

"I was overwhelmed when told of this unexpected and undeserved honour, and immediately thought of all the women who had taught and nurtured me, and those who have been quietly working to give others the chance to live with dignity. Thank you SWHF for giving me the opportunity to thank everyone who has given me the courage and inspiration to believe and reach out knowing that we can all make this world a better place."

Aziza Ali

Pioneer restaurateur and promoter of Malay culture

"I feel blessed and honoured about being inducted to the Hall of Fame. It is a fantastic way of appreciating those who dared to do different things in different ways, to start something new. In my case, I'm glad I'm being recognised for doing something that nobody did in my era. We went through so many challenges and succeeded for 24 years. It encourages younger people not to give up. When you want to achieve, go all the way. Help people as well. And fulfil your heart. It is like 3-in-1 coffee."

Mary Klass

Pioneering athlete

"I am tremendously happy and proud that they remember my past achievement as a sprinter. I am very proud that after so many years, 50 years since the time I ran in the Asian games and the Olympics, they recognise me. It's such a good honour, and it's never too late. We were good sportswomen. The one who had given me the most support is my late husband. It will be good that my children and my grandchildren will be able to see my achievements."

Tan Yoon Yin

Singapore's first lady of netball

“I was very surprised. I never thought about all these things. I’m a nobody. I’m just an old woman of 87 years. The Hall of Fame encourages women to speak up and work harder, to contribute to the country and help society. Now women are educated too, not just the men. With this equality we must also help the country.”