**Farida Habib Shah**

It is with great sadness that we inform all OWSD members and friends of OWSD that Farida Habib Shah died on 1 November at her home in Kuala Lumpur after a short illness.

Farida was personally known to many OWSD members as our Vice President for the Asia and Pacific region, and floods of condolence messages have come in to the OWSD office, testimony to the fact that she was dearly loved as a person, greatly respected as a scientist, admired as an entrepreneur and appreciated as a firm supporter of young women from developing countries trying to carve out careers in scientific research in an often hostile environment. We will collect and post these messages as an attachment over the next few days.

Farida's commitment to OWSD began ten years ago in 1994 when she first became an OWSD member and this commitment continued until her very last days when she was hopeful of attending the next executive board (EB) meeting scheduled for December in Trieste, Italy. Farida was elected a member of the OWSD EB in 1999 and in 2002 became one of the relatively few women at the time to be elected a TWAS Fellow. Farida continued to serve on the OWSD board and was then elected Vice President for the Asia and Pacific region by the members' vote at the General Assembly in Beijing, China in 2010. Two years later Farida's position as an eminent scientist working hard to promote the cause of science in developing coutries was confirmed when she was elected a member of the TWAS Council for East and Southeast Asia.

Farida Shah's pioneering research in molecular biology and genetic engineering contributed significantly to the increased production of oil palm and the manufature of related products in her home country, Malaysia.

Malaysia produces 39 % of the world's palm oil and has a crucial role to play in fulfilling the growing global need for sustainable oils and fats. Farida was involved in developing molecular marker techniques for determining the genetic diversity and phylogenetic relationships of oil palms and she had recently developed DNA markers for medicinal plants. Farida was also careful to optimise the impact her research and innovative techniques could have on the national palm oil economy by establishing start-up and consultancy companies to translate the results into commercially viable products.

Born in 1948 in Melaka, Malaysia, Shah obtained her MSc in immunogenetics from the University of Malaya and her PhD in molecular biology from the University of New South Wales in Australia. She was the first Malaysian professor of molecular biology at the National University of Malaysia (UKM). In 2003, she set up and became CEO of the Melaka Biotechnology Corporation and Director of the Melaka Institute of Biotechnology. She founded the government-owned Melaka Biotech Holdings and was honorary professor at the *Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman* (UTAR), Malaysia.

Perhaps it should be said that behind every great woman there are supportive men, who, rather than put obstacles in the path of their ambition, encourage women to reach for the stars. As a hugely successful entrepreneur, Farida's father supported each of his eight children's careers, emphasising the importance of a good education. Farida was very proud of her father, who died at the age of 93 in June this year.

Farida spoke to interviewers of her father's 'list of firsts' , which included opening the first petrol station in Petaling Jaya, the first drive-in cinema, the first bowling alley, and the first venue for traditional Malaysian dances. “He was also the first Malay to get involved in film-making,” Farida said. He established the iconic landmark 'Shah’s Village Hotel' in 1967, which is still in business and also owned Shah Tower, which was, in Farida's words, the 'culmination of his entrepreneurship.'

Following in her father's entrepreneurial footsteps, Farida founded the biotechnology company, *Tropical BioEssence* and the Biotech Start-up and Consultancy company, *Novel Plants*. She also developed a DNA Marker Technology Platform in order to authenticate and verify medicinal and herbal plant species and varieties together with a Bioinformatics Database Platform.

She was involved in the development of medicinal plants for foods, neutraceuticals and cosmeceuticals and to this end formed the company *FS Natural Story.*

Farida was not only a successful businesswoman, but a prolific academic, authoring over 200 papers and presenting more than 250. She was a dedicated teacher and mentor, writing and translating several works relevant to her courses and including motivating seminars for women undergraduates in her teaching.

On a personal note, Farida leaves a devoted husband, the travel writer and photographer Peter Anderson, who accompanied her on many trips around the world. In the early '90s they drove the length and breadth of Malaysia together, not just on the highways and main roads, but also along dirt tracks that took them to lesser known spots. These routes are explored in detail in their travel guide, 'Discover Malaysia', published in 1994, which includes directions, sights to see, food to eat and places to stay.

This book is testimony to Farida's collaborative personality, her attention to detail , taste for adventure and love of her home country - all ingredients which have arguably made her a great scientist whose work has had an inestimable - but very tangible - impact in the developing world.