

NUS ALUMNI AWARDS 2023
CITATION FOR EMINENT ALUMNI AWARD

The eighth President of the Republic of Singapore (14 September 2017 to 13 September 2023), Mdm Halimah Yacob has served Singapore with distinction in many national and international roles. A trailblazing alumna, she has been our Chancellor, as well as a Member of Parliament, Speaker of Parliament, Minister of State, Deputy Secretary-General of the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), Vice-Chair and Spokesperson of the Workers' Groups in various International Labour Conference Committees, and much more. Underpinning these multiple titles and roles is her unwavering dedication to advancing the lives of individuals and communities, particularly the underprivileged. Recognising Mdm Halimah as an inspiring leader with outstanding contributions to Singapore and the wider community, the National University of Singapore (NUS) conferred on her the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws in 2016.

A leader who rose from modest beginnings, Mdm Halimah spent much of her childhood helping her widowed mother to run a food stall, which often left her too exhausted to properly attend school. The deprivation and hardship she experienced led to her decision to study law, which would enable her to help the vulnerable gain access to fair treatment and justice. After obtaining a Bachelor of Laws as well as a Master of Laws at NUS, Mdm Halimah joined NTUC, where she advised unions and workers on industrial relations and their employment rights. She spent 33 years with the labour movement, holding various positions and rising to the position of Deputy Secretary-General of NTUC. Mdm Halimah became the first Singaporean trade unionist to be elected to the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), where she served for 12 years, representing workers globally.

Making her political debut in the 2001 General Election, Mdm Halimah served as Member of Parliament from 2001 to 2017. She was appointed Minister of State for Community Development and Sports where she introduced programmes for seniors and enhanced services for the disabled. She also mooted the idea of an inclusive community space which embraces diverse abilities, an idea that was realised in 2015 when the Enabling Village was opened.

In 2013, Mdm Halimah became the first woman in Singapore to be appointed Speaker of Parliament. This was followed by another first in 2017 when she was sworn in as the country's first female President. Wielding the second key to the country's reserves, Mdm Halimah - along with the Council of Presidential Advisors - rigorously reviewed, and approved, the Government's proposals to tap on the nation's reserves during the COVID-19 pandemic to help stem the spread of the virus and also cushion its impact on our economy.

Mdm Halimah continued to give a strong voice to the disadvantaged as our country's President. She initiated the Empowering for Life Fund to help disadvantaged groups improve their circumstances through measures such as upskilling. She also launched the Enabling Employment Pledge which saw more than 280 employers signing on to train and place people with disabilities.

As a President who had pledged to serve all, regardless of race, language or religion, social cohesion was important to her. She initiated a platform for conversations on forging stronger interfaith understanding and ideas to foster greater harmony in society. This resulted in the first International Conference on Cohesive Societies held in Singapore in 2019 which brought people, local and international, together to discuss topics such as faith, culture and identity.

As a member of the NUS Council from 2004, and later the NUS Board of Trustees from 2006 to 2011, Mdm Halimah often stressed the importance of helping students in need of financial aid to access a wide range of programmes. Later, in 2017, we had the privilege of welcoming her as our 10th Chancellor, where she launched the University's official flower, the *Papilionanda* National University of Singapore. As NUS Chancellor, Mdm Halimah conferred close to 76,000 undergraduate, masters, doctorate, and honorary degrees over six years and presided over the Main Commencement ceremonies for graduates and honorary graduates. During the online Main Commencement Ceremony of 2021, which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mdm Halimah encouraged the Class of 2021 to take the challenges in their stride and hold fast to the University's values of innovation, resilience, excellence, respect and integrity.

Mdm Halimah was closely involved in many other aspects of life at NUS. As concerned as ever about problems faced by women and workers, she shared her thoughts at forums organised by NUS, such as the Institute of Policy Studies' Women's Conference in 2021, and at its 35th Anniversary Gala dinner in June this year, where she talked about the importance of integrating new migrants. Her warm support for our students and alumni shone through in the events she graced, including the NUSSU Rag & Flag Days, NUS Bizad Charity Runs, and Bukit Timah Homecomings.

In June this year, Mdm Halimah travelled to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to lend her support to NUS for the 52nd UM-NUS Inter-University Tunku Chancellor Golf Tournament. Her presence meant a lot to the NUS alumni and student golfers who travelled to KL for the tournament, and affirmed the deep ties between NUS and the University of Malaya.

Mdm Halimah's outstanding leadership and contributions have been recognised through the years with many accolades and awards, including the Berita Harian Achiever of the Year Award 2001, Her World Woman of the Year Award 2003, and AWARE Heroine Award 2011. She was also inducted into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame in 2014. Just this past week, she received the Order of Temasek (With High Distinction). This is our nation's highest civilian honour.

We are pleased to add to this plethora of awards and honours. In recognition of her outstanding contributions to NUS, Singapore and the international community, the University is pleased to confer the NUS Eminent Alumni Award for 2023 on Mdm Halimah Yacob.