

# Khor's ideas and legacies live on

By **Datuk Dr Fauziah Mohd Taib, Dr Shazelina Zainul Abidin** - April 5, 2020 @ 11:21am



Diplomat Martin Khor was instrumental in helping the international community secure the Commission on Sustainable Development and adopt the Convention on Biological Diversity. FILE PIC

LIKE most diplomatic services in the world, the Malaysian Foreign Service produces generalists rather than specialists. The nature of the job is such that officers need to know everything rather than one particular subject in-depth.

We rely so much on experts in their given field, particularly ground-breaking thinkers in the field of international relations.

Martin Khor was one such expert. Wisma Putra first came into contact with him in the 1980s, seeing him as an expert on issues of concern to Malaysia's national interests. Khor fitted our foreign policy pulse and objectives.

Here was an advocate of democracy, good governance, a champion of the developing states, an environmentalist and yet a soft-spoken activist who did not have to yell his opinions from the rooftops. His was a path of persuasion and negotiations, of scenario-building rather than blind criticism, of cajoling, lobbying and networking rather than adversarial confrontations and unilateral action.

Throughout the years, Malaysia's diplomats worked closely with Khor. His Third World Network alerted not only Malaysia, but many developing countries to the rich countries' agenda – the unfair trade practices, the imbalanced human rights perspective that adversely affected newly independent countries, the North's agenda on climate change and sustainability, poverty, health issues and finances.

There was nothing that Khor could not do. He was the reason why Malaysia was so successful at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, or the Earth Summit as it was famously known. Khor was instrumental in helping the international community secure the Commission on Sustainable Development and adopt the Convention on Biological Diversity.

An economist by training, Khor was everything to the developing world. In short, Khor was our Stieglitz, our Chomsky.

As a person, Khor was known for his simplicity in dressing. He hated wearing a suit and tie for meetings with Wisma and with the other players. As soon as it became acceptable to do so, he kept the jacket, but lost the tie, and that was how we would go for the meetings. He used to carry his documents in a plastic bag, and upped it later with a worn and possibly pre-loved seminar bag.

The last time we met him was at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies a few months ago. It was the discussion on Malaysia's Foreign Policy Framework, chaired by the minister. He looked frail even then, but his mind was as sharp as ever.

Little did we know that in less than a year, we would lose this intellectual activist. The loss is that of Wisma's, but his ideas, and his legacies live on, in this international community that has benefited much from his sage advice and visionary outlook.

Datuk Ting Wen Lian, who worked closely with him at the 1992 Earth Summit, summed it best: "Martin is irreplaceable as a leading light for the economic plight of developing countries. His departure is a loss for the third world."

May he rest in peace.

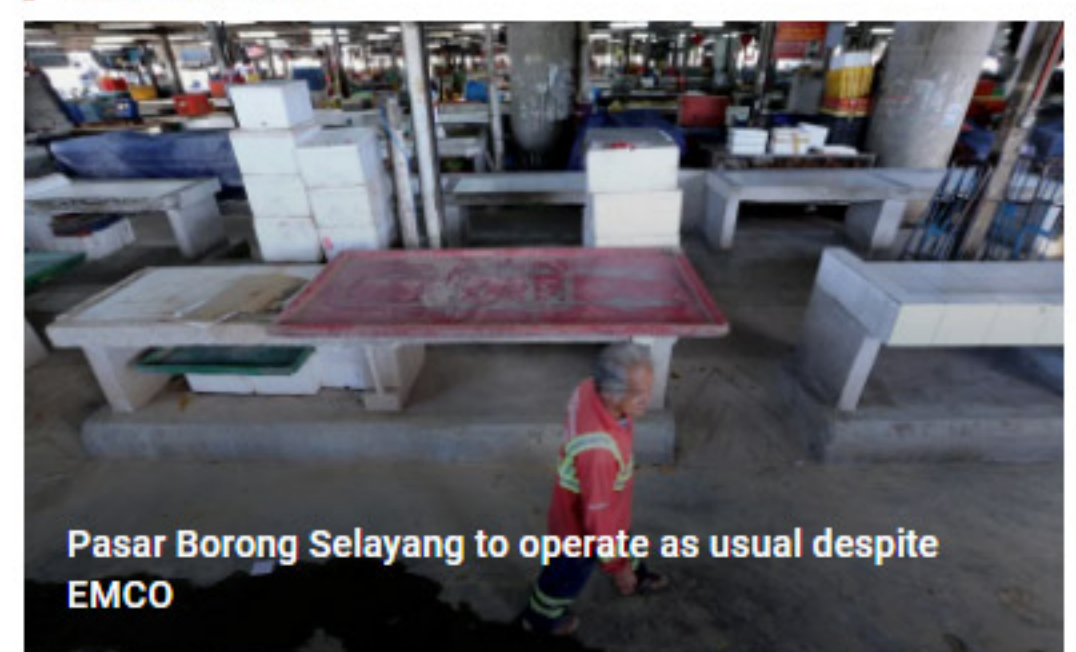
**Dr Fauziah Mohd Taib is Malaysia's former ambassador to Fiji and the Netherlands, and permanent representative to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; Dr Shazelina Zainul Abidin is a foreign service officer, who writes on international affairs with an emphasis on Africa**



## MOST POPULAR

- LATEST**
- MOST READ**
- RECOMMENDED**
- 24m **Civil servants have to make loan repayments during MCO**
- 31m **Alliance Bank #SupportLokal initiative continues to gain support from various SME**
- 41m **Malaysian students abroad advised to stay put**
- 43m **M3Tech partners with ATS to develop facial tracker for Covid-19 chambers**
- 44m **Covid-19: MPMA, FMFTA gear up to address PPE shortage**

## TRENDING



## RELATED ARTICLES



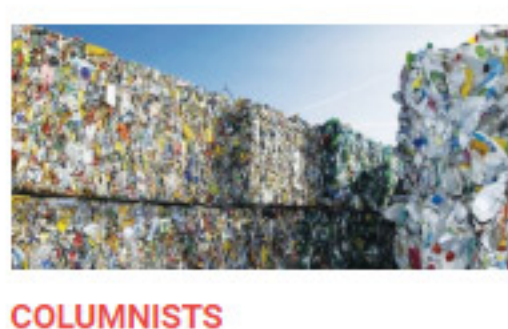
**NATION**  
Apr 1, 2020 @ 10:51am  
**Global consumer activist Martin Khor dies**



**LETTERS**  
Jul 17, 2019 @ 10:19pm  
**Sustainability boosts living**



**NATION** Apr 1, 2020 @ 2:31pm  
**Condolences pour in for late Martin Khor**



**COLUMNISTS**  
Jul 11, 2018 @ 8:40am  
**Redefining policies for sustainable development**