

DIPLOMAT EXTRAORDINAIRE

CITATION FOR PROF TOMMY KOH



It gives me great pleasure to read this citation for Prof Tommy Koh, a trusted friend of many years. I prepared this citation by first reading his CV, supplied by the organiser of this lecture; it was far too long to fit a 15-minute citation. Next, I googled for information on Prof Tommy Koh; it turned out to be far longer than his official CV. Finally, I consulted some of the books that Tommy has published: one of his latest books *Over Singapore* (2015) provided me with a helpful summary of his credentials.¹

Prof Tommy Koh was born in Singapore in 1937. He attended Raffles Institution and received an Entrance Scholarship to study Law at the University of Malaya, Singapore. In 1961, he graduated with an LLB (First Class Honours) degree from the University of Malaya. He served his Law Pupilage with the famous lawyer David Marshall.

His diplomatic career began in 1968 when he was appointed Singapore's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York, USA.

Professor Koh is currently Ambassador-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Professor of Law, National University of Singapore (NUS); Chairman of the Governing Board of the Centre for International Law and Rector of Tembusu College at NUS. He is also Co-Chairman of the China-Singapore Forum, the Indian-Singapore Strategic Dialogue and the Japan-Singapore Symposium.¹ His current CV lists many other positions that he holds.

Prof Koh was Singapore's Permanent Representative to the United Nations

in New York for 13 years. He was Ambassador to the United States of America for six years. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Law of NUS. He was also the President of the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea. He chaired the Preparatory Committee for and the Main Committee at the Earth Summit. He has served as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. He was also Singapore's Chief Negotiator for the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement. He has chaired two dispute panels for the World Trade Organization.

In 1984, Prof Koh was conferred the Yale University Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws. He received the Elizabeth Haub Prize for Environmental Law in 1996 and was made a Champion of the Earth by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2006. He also received the Great Negotiator Award 2014 from Harvard University on 10 April 2014.

He has been decorated by the Government of Singapore with the Public Service Star (1971); the Meritorius Service Medal (Pingat Jasa Gemilang) (1979); the Distinguished Service Order (Darjah Utama Bakti Cemerlang) (1990) and the Order of Nila Utama (First Class) (2008).

For his services in international diplomacy, he has been decorated by several Heads of States and Governments: he was appointed Commander in the Order of the Golden Ark by HRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherland (1993); awarded "the Commander, First Class, of the Order of the Lion of Finland" by the President of Finland (2000); conferred the rank of Officer in the Order of the Legion of Honour by the French President (2001); bestowed the Encomienda of Isabella la Catolica by King Juan Carlos of Spain (2004), etc.

References

1. Koh T. *Over Singapore*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2015.
2. Koh T. A diplomat's secret weapon. *The Straits Times* 2014 Oct 8. Available at: <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/a-diplomats-secret-weapon>.
3. Tow SH. *Foot Prints in the Sands of Time*. Singapore: Reformation Banner Publishers, 2009.
4. Koh T. Letter to my grandchildren in 2065. *The Straits Times* 2015 Aug 3. Available at: <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/letter-to-my-grandchildren-in-2065>.



While Professor Koh's brain is that of a diplomat, his heart belongs to a medical doctor; he married Siew Aing in 1967. Siew Aing graduated MBBS from NUS. Behind a successful man is a successful woman: Prof Koh acknowledged that his wife had helped diplomatically when he was Singapore's fourth ambassador to the USA.²

Prof Koh's interest in medicine began early. In the 1960s, he led a debating team against a team led by Prof Tow Siang Hwa (my teacher in Obstetrics & Gynaecology at NUS) on the motion, "Therapeutic Abortion should be adopted as a method of Population Control".³ Prof Koh lost the debate but he was voted the best speaker. Prof Tow wrote: "Prof Koh is 'Singapore's best known overseas representative' and 'his hospitality caused even the winter snow to melt'".³

The very successful and happy life of Prof Koh as a career diplomat and family man is based on eight principles, which guided his life: Love Singapore; Love the World; Love Family; Make Friends for Life; Do Not Worship Money; Be Kind; Be Loyal and Be Healthy, and Be Rich Culturally.⁴

I hope I have convinced my audience that Prof Tommy Koh is not only a renowned diplomat extraordinaire but also a doctor "at heart". He is thus in a unique position to deliver this 2015 SMA Lecture on "Medicine and Diplomacy". ♦

PROFILE

DELIVERED BY

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Legend

1. Prof Cheah Jin Seng, Prof Tommy Koh and Dr Wong captured during the presentation of token of appreciation