

Biography: Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong

Former ISIS Chairman, Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, who passed away at the age of 77, had a long and distinguished career spanning five decades, from 1957 to 1993. He worked at the highest levels of the government sector and served as well in the corporate sector. He was appointed Chairman of ISIS in July 1990, taking over from former Prime Minister, the late Tun Hussein Onn, and served in that capacity until February 1997.

Tan Sri Zainal, a Kelantanese, was witness to many historic Southeast Asian events. When he was Deputy Secretary-General I, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was involved in efforts towards promoting regional co-operation and in the formation of Asean. From 1965 to 1969 he was Principal Assistant Secretary of the Southeast Asia Division, primarily in charge of the resolution of the Indonesian Confrontation. He became Under Secretary of the Division in 1969. Prior to that, from 1961 – 1964, as Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tan Sri Zainal was in charge of the Formation of Malaysia Desk. He retired as Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry in 1988.

In his career in the Malaysian Foreign Service, he was Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations from 1980 to 1984, and Ambassador to the USSR from 1977 to 1980 while concurrently accredited to Bulgaria, Finland, and Mongolia. From 1972 to 1977 he was Ambassador to Indonesia while concurrently accredited to Papua New Guinea.

While Chairman of ISIS, Tan Sri Zainal was concurrently, Chairman of the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA), of Perwaja Steel Sdn Bhd, and of the Datum Board of Trustees. He was also an Adjunct Professor of Universiti Utara Malaysia and a Fellow of Intan (The National Institute of Public Administration of Malaysia).



After his retirement, Tan Sri Zainal was involved in various charitable organisations and societies, such as the Cheshire Home.

During the 47th Malaysia Day celebrations at Kota Kinabalu on Sept 16, 2010, Tan Sri Zainal was presented with the inaugural *Tokoh Malaysia* award in recognition of his long career in the diplomatic corps.

Calling Tan Sri Zainal a Malaysian Super Diplomat, a reader of the *New Straits Times*, in a letter to the editor,¹ had this to say of him: *Zainal belonged to a rare breed of Malaysians who could blend decorum and civility with intellectual dexterity. Few have earned the distinction in more than 50 years in public service and ... the corporate world, and even fewer have helmed more than one organisation concurrently.*

¹ James Gonzales, a reader of the *New Straits Times*, in a letter to the Editor, 13/10/10