

Malaysian social entrepreneur receives the Commonwealth Points of Light award

After conducting research and discovering that thousands of Malaysian girls in rural communities miss an average of 60 days of school a year due to a lack of menstrual products and knowledge, Anja Juliah has embarked on a quest to address the problem. She, and her social enterprise, Athena Holdings, educate girls in rural communities on menstruation and provides reusable sanitary pads, this has helped to ensure that girls can continue with their studies whilst also reducing the number of single-use sanitary pads going to landfill.

Anja Juliah has since extended her work to support girls in indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak, benefitting at least 1,600 girls since 2016.

In addition to this, Anja has also provided mentorship for women aspiring to become social entrepreneurs, and has previously conducted financial empowerment programmes for young housewives who had never worked before to teach them basic entrepreneurship.

H.E. Charles Hay, the British High Commissioner to Malaysia, said:

Education is the key to a better life. Thanks to the remarkable effort of educating girls in rural communities about menstrual health and providing reusable sanitary pads, Anja Juliah has helped ensure girls remain in schools and get the basic education that they need. I would also like to commend Anja Juliah for empowering young women through her coaching and mentoring work. I hope Anja Juliah's work will inspire other social entrepreneurs to make a difference in their respective communities.

Upon receiving the award, Anja Juliah said:

This award came as an absolute surprise to me. I am deeply humbled and honoured. This journey has never been about me at all. Exactly 10 years ago, I started teaching girls in rural Borneo about menstruation and sponsoring washable sanitary pads to them. As a result, the girls did not have to be absent from school. Education is their pathway to a better life. I am thankful to my family, friends and partners who have supported my mission to empowering girls and young women in Malaysia. I hope my work will enable girls to pursue their dreams, and inspire them to help others.

The [Commonwealth Points of Light award programme](#) was launched in the UK in 2018 when the UK chaired the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

(CHOGM). Following the success of this programme, the late Queen Elizabeth II, as the Head of the Commonwealth, decided to continue this award programme beyond 2018 to recognise good deeds and highlight stories of service to community.

Anja Juliah was delighted to find that the certificate presented to her today was in fact signed by the late Queen Elizabeth II before her passing recently. This made the award even more special and meaningful.

Prior to Anja Juliah, 4 other Malaysians have received the Commonwealth Points of Light award since 2018. They are:

- Dr Madhusudhan who provides free medical treatment to the homeless through his Teddy Mobile Clinics
- Dr Chen Pelf Nyok from the Turtle Conservation Society who protects freshwater turtles in Terengganu
- Khor Sue Yee and Aurora Tin from Zero Waste Malaysia for promoting a zero-waste lifestyle to save the environment
- philanthropist Kuan Chee Heng who is popularly known as Uncle Kentang