

## OBITUARY



### **Prof Dr Sornchai Looareesuwan**

Secretary General/Coordinator  
SEAMEO TROP MED Network  
(1998-2007)

For three terms, Prof Sornchai has served as the Secretary General/Coordinator of the SEAMEO TROP MED Network. It is a great challenge both to his professional and personal life that he faced and accepted with dedication and humility. He plunged into the responsibilities of the position with the same passion and energy that he has given to that of being a malaria specialist. He raised the bar for the organization in terms of its programs and projects, areas of expertise and more importantly in the organization's partnership and linkages for health development. He served as an inspiration to everyone especially to those who worked close to him. He allowed and enabled the professional growth of people; he delegated responsibilities with corresponding authority and at the same time providing the necessary support and facilitation; and he was quick to recognize and respect other peoples' areas of expertise. He always placed the interest of the organization above that of his own. He was the embodiment of "the capacity building mandate" of the organization and a true leader of the Network.

On a personal level, he was always a true friend to everyone, a person who exudes openness, kindness and was always considerate of the feelings of others. He as such a good soul who shared his spirituality with everyone whatever your denomination is.

Prof Sornchai will be long remembered and cherished by the SEAMEO family.

Prof Dr Ma Sandra B Tempongko  
Deputy Coordinator  
SEAMEO TROP MED Network  
25 July 2007

## IN MEMORIAM

PROF DR SORNCHAI LOOAREESUWAN (1949-2007)

Ma Sandra Tempongo, Deputy Coordinator of the SEAMEO TROP MED Network, called me on a late Sunday night with the news that Prof Dr Sornchai had passed away. After the initial shock, the thought that occurred to me was that Dr Sornchai had died with his boots on.

"Dying with boots on" is an expression drawn from the military and is, perhaps, not appropriate to apply to Dr Sornchai. He was soft-spoken and mild-mannered, in every way, a kind, thoughtful and gentle person. But, like the soldiers described by the phrase, Dr Sornchai died in the thick of the action.

Dr Sornchai was present for the opening session of the Centre Directors Meeting on 4 July 2007 and participated actively in the discussions, despite his obvious weakened condition. He attended the briefing at SPAFA for HE Bambang Sudibyo, Indonesia's Minister of National Education and SEAMEO Council President, on 9 July and made the presentation for the TROP MED Network. He even joined the lunch at Amari Watergate hosted by Prof Dr Wichit, Minister of Education of Thailand for the SEAMEO President.

On the elevator going down from the luncheon venue, I teased Dr Sornchai about his faulty sense of time. He had indicated that the power point presentation to update Minister Bambang on TROP MED would take five minutes. The presentation was comprehensive and informative, but took closer to 15 minutes to complete. I suspect Dr Sornchai knew very well that the presentation would take more than five minutes. But I now also suspect that he also knew, barely two weeks before his death, that time was closing in on him. And he wanted to get as much done before he left. Two days before he died, on Sunday, 22 July, he was still signing papers for TROP MED.

I said he was gentle and soft-spoken. But he did get very excited, to the point that he would begin to stammer—because he was in such a hurry to get the words out—when he was talking about his TROP MED plans. In his continuous lobby for TROP MED support, he was unabashedly aggressive and actually inclined to do the "hard sell."

Apart from the Directors of the Centres in the Philippines, Dr Sornchai was the first Center Director that I got to know even before taking up the SEAMEO Secretariat assignment in Bangkok. He had gone to Manila for one of the many regional TROP MED Projects and he had invited the Philippine Secretary of Health and myself, as SEAMEO Council President, to one of the dinner functions. It was my first close-up look at TROP MED and both Secretary Manuel Dayrit and I were quite impressed with Dr Sornchai's entrepreneurial approach to the work of the Center.

I did not know about Dr Sornchai's medical history and his precarious health condition. Perhaps, he should not have worked as hard as he did. Certainly, I saw no evidence that he was content to coast in order to conserve his energy. TROP MED was a mission and a passion for Dr Sornchai. He was single-minded and unrelenting in the pursuit of Center objectives. He seemed to keep track of my travel schedule, and he was not shy at all about asking me to do something for the Center in the places I would visit. And I was happy to do it for him.

TROP MED is arguably one of SEAMEO's flagships. Dr Sornchai had his own network, his own flotilla of ships to manage. And TROP MED is the clear example of how SEAMEO is able to address intersectoral issues, extending its work beyond the boundaries of education ministries, while at the same time promoting their objectives. What TROP MED is today is to a large extent part of the legacy that Dr Sornchai has left behind. TROP MED will ever serve as a reminder that Dr Sornchai, in some way, remains with us.

Edilberto C de Jesús  
Secretariat Director  
Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)

## TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR SORNCHAI LOOAREESUWAN

### An appreciation of my friend Sornchai Looareesuwan

Sornchai was my closest friend and colleague during the 7 years Mary and I lived and worked in Thailand. He and his family have remained close family friends, for whom we feel the greatest possible affection. We are all devastated by the news of his death, even though this was not entirely unexpected.

Sornchai was a delightful, energetic, enthusiastic and resourceful physician, clinical investigator and teacher with a unique, lovable and irrepressible personality. He was a founding member of the Wellcome Mahidol University-Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Programme, initiated in 1978-1979, and a key element of the studies of malaria and snake bite carried out while I was the Co-Director of that programme from 1979-1986.

Mary and I spent many months working with Sornchai in the field, in Chantaburi (where both his wife Vaewta and my wife Mary helped us in the laboratory), Trang and Kanchanaburi, but I also had the chance to travel with him to many parts of the country as part of our snake bite survey. He was truly my "guide, philosopher and friend" in introducing me to so many aspects of the richness of Thai life, language, food, natural history and culture.

We were so delighted when his administrative talents were recognised in his appointment as Dean of The Faculty to Tropical Medicine, and by his achievements in that post and as head of the SEAMEO-TROPMED Project. Sornchai's success as a researcher; especially in malaria chemotherapy (for example the original work on atovaquone and artemisinin derivatives), and his colossal productivity in research publications; has earned him a high international reputation and many national and international awards. These success were thoroughly deserved and achieved through incredibly hard work and enormous resourcefulness and initiative.

During the long and difficult years of his illness, we have admired Sornchai's courage, the strength he has gained from his Buddhist religion and most of all the support and love of his delightful family, Vaewta and the twins.

Sornchai was a marvellous friend and colleague who was largely responsible for the success and productivity of the original years of the Oxford-Mahidol Programme. I will never forget his contribution and can never compensate for the loss of such a dear and devoted family friend.

David.

David A Warrell, MA DM DSc FRCP FRCPE FMedSci

Professor of Tropical Medicine and Infectious Diseases, Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine, University of Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital, Headington, Oxford OX3 9DU, UK.

Tel: ++441865 221332/220968; Fax: 220984; mobile: 07785242978

<david.warrell@ndm.ox.ac.uk>

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