## LAKE TOBA WRITERS FESTIVAL

Appreciation from Barbara Situmorang for Lake Toba Writers Festival and sharing of recollections on her husband Bp Sitor Situmorang. This message was read out during the opening session of Lake Toba Writers Festival 2024 held at Samosir, North Sumatera, Indonesia. Writers, academicians, readers and family members of Bp Sitor paid rich tributes to his legacy on commencement of the 100<sup>th</sup> year birthday celebrations of the poet. A similar tribute was also paid by readers and writers participating in Lake Toba Writers Festival 2023.

## Quote

Dear Bapak Amol Titus and participants,

My wholehearted apologies that I am not able to attend your Lake Toba Writers Festival, held for the second time on Samosir, the land that Sitor loved so much. I am very honored that you open the Festival with a celebration of 100 years Sitor Situmorang, the great Indonesian poet often called the poet of Lake Toba.

Born in 1924 he lived through many periods marking Indonesia's history: brought up in the old Batak culture, he was educated at Dutch schools in colonial times where he had his first exposure to European Writers and poets. Here he wrote his first poem, translating into Batak Multatuli's Saidja and Adinda. Living through the Japanese period he emerged after Independance as a talented journalist and aspiring nationalist. His stay in the Netherlands and France in the early 50's formed him further as poet and writer, resulting in a burst of literary creativity upon his return. He engaged actively in politics, becoming a right hand of Soekarno in shaping national cultural policy during turbulent times which ultimately, at the crackdown of the nationalist leftist movement in 1965, brought him to imprisonment for 8 years. He emerged not broken, without hatred, but eager to understand the changed times and add his insights and poetry to it.

I shared my life with Sitor for 38 years, till his death of Alzheimer 10 years ago.

I see him as a man in harmony with two distinct sides. As a public figure he is vocal, a fierce debater expressing clearly his opinions based on sharp analysis, engaging his audience. Anyone who heard him speak will remember it!

As a private person he is quiet, rather introvert, expressing his feelings in love and poetry. His outlook is international, but he is foremost Indonesian, with strong roots in his Batak heritage.

He is often categorized as a poet of 'angkatan 45', but he kept writing poetry well into the second millenium.

He is currently best known for his poetry, admired for its clear language and poetic imaginary. By writing Toba Na Sae he contributed significantly to a fresh understanding of Batak culture. But his essays, and many speeches of the late 50's till mid 60's, need to be made accessible and studied, as these contributed to nation building and developing a national culture at that time. You will also pay tribute to Pramudya Ananta Tour on the occasion of his 100th birthday next year. Though linked to different political parties, they were friends and shared same ideals for Indonesia.

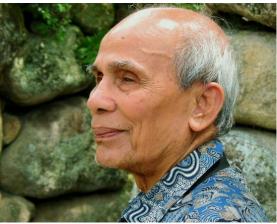
I wish you joy and inspiration from Sitor's work on the occasion of his 100th birthday.

## Unquote

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Left to Right : Sitor and Barbara Situmorang at an event; Bp Sitor Situmorang in contemplation (Photo Courtesy : Barbara Situmorang)



Amol Titus presenting Barbara Situmorang a copy of his book *The Fellowship of Krakatau*, a poetic dialogue of discovery among Indonesia's fabled volcanoes, at Pangururan, Samosir. Also featured are prominent LTWF supporters including Bp Thomson Hutasoit (4<sup>th</sup> from right) and Bp Melani Butar-Butar (left).

(Photo courtesy: LTWF)