

Simply a lovely, wonderful person! My father's greatest compliment was, "S/he had good instincts." It was Vijaya's lot in life not only to have them, but to act on them, unfailingly — perhaps not the easiest thing to do at the United Nations. I will, like everyone else, miss her enormously.

**C. STEPHEN BALDWIN** *Legal Officer, former Panel of Counsel*



Vijaya was a very accomplished athlete who, only a few years before retirement, crossed the English Channel. This achievement required years of training, willpower, great determination, perseverance, courage and strength. In the same manner, without ever being discouraged, with generosity and caring for her colleagues, Vijaya tackled the daunting task of their defense under a dysfunctional system and with such insufficient means at her disposal. She also contributed to the new system of administration of justice that she had at heart.

**ANNE FOSTY** *Legal Officer, former Panel of Counsel*

She was a very rare and unique staff member in the fashion she demonstrated her devotion to duty and in her humane and compassionate handling of each case. At the same time she maintained excellent relations all around and never failed to provide support to her colleagues and associates.

**ANTONIO T. BAUTISTA** *Volunteer Counsel, OSLA; and Member, former Panel of Counsel*



I first heard about Vijaya more than two decades ago when, as a young lawyer at the UN, I was trying to find out how to assist my colleagues in need of legal advice and representation. My phone rang in Santiago, and there was this encouraging and cheerful voice on the other end, inviting me to the great adventure of fighting for our internal justice. We kept a very encouraging phone and later email contact for years and I only met her personally during a mission to NY in 2005. I will never forget her welcoming attitude, the funny efforts to look for a place to sit amidst papers, folders, books, candles and flowers, and her offering me a tempting variety of incredible teas which we drank while talking for hours in the middle of her taking care of people, phone calls, her reviewing submissions and arranging beautiful flowers in fresh water. After that wonderful journey, I left her office with a reinforced conviction that, as many people wisely say, "Impossible is not a fact, only an opinion."

Some years afterwards, during a longer assignment in New York in 2007, I was finally able to assist the New York Panel of Counsel for a month. I had the opportunity to share cases (some of them that I still handle), approaches, initiatives and legal arguments with her, but also all her excitement, decisions and hope for the crossing of the Channel. Other friends in the office and I enjoyed learning about the Channel swimmers' fraternity. We examined maps, tide and winds information, and we walked in our minds and souls along Normandy. I really

felt like we were preparing for a D-Day.

Of course, one could speak about sadness, surprise, denial of the departure of somebody so cheerful, active, healthy. But let me say that I firmly believe that she departed in a time of joy, of life, of hope. I am sure she has entered that wonderful place in which she certainly believed through her strong and lively faith, smiling and transmitting courage, dreams for a better world, beauty, compassion, commitment. She will surely cast a different but equally powerful light as she did during her passage for this life on Earth.

I only hope that, as a pro-bono counselor for my colleagues worldwide, I am able to keep the flame that she once lit for all those in need of justice.

**CARMEN ARTIGAS** *Legal Officer, ECLAC, Santiago;  
and Legal Officer, former Panel of Counsel*



As the Coordinator of the Panel of Counsel, Vijaya achieved much more than anyone believed was possible. Because of her efforts and influence, the administration of justice became much more fair and equitable. She also made major contributions to the development of the new system of justice.

In some legal cases in Peacekeeping Missions, staff felt abandoned and hopeless. Vijaya made an immediate and positive difference in their lives. Vijaya took risks instead of playing it safe; she boldly pursued what she believed in and she made a major difference in the lives of many people. Vijaya lived a life to be proud of.

**BERNARD ADAMS** *Volunteer Counsel, OSLA; and Member, former Panel of Counsel*



Vijaya will be remembered not only for her tireless efforts to assist staff in their time of need for a compassionate listener and advocate, but also as an effective voice for gender issues in the workplace. She has touched so many of us and will be truly missed.

**AMAL OUMMIH** *Legal Officer, OSLA; and Legal Officer, former Panel of Counsel*



Dear Vijaya, you have fought a good fight, you have finished the race, you have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for you a crown of righteousness. Rest in Peace!

**ROSALIE AKA** *Legal Specialist, Legal Support Office Bureau of Management, UNDP*

Vijaya Claxton was full of life and energy and, more importantly, lived life to the full. She was a fantastic advocate for many former and present UN employees who were wrongfully treated by the Organization and she gave a renewed sense that justice was still possible in this world despite the odds stacked against them. The richness and depth of her experience in advocacy of employees' rights in the UN is probably without equal. Vijaya was always willing to impart her knowledge and experience and give advice despite her hectic schedule.

Vijaya was in many ways a pioneer of the changes in the internal justice system and was constantly seeking and successfully using new ways to obtain justice for aggrieved staff members. The changes she pioneered were necessary for the UN and will, in the long term, be positive for the UN and its employees. One day when the history is written of Internal Justice at the UN, Vijaya's important role will undoubtedly be recognized.

Personally, many of the lessons Vijaya taught me about advocacy still form the basis of the work that I do now as a lawyer. I also remember the wonderful cookies and other goodies that she always made available to visitors of the Panel of Counsel. It was indeed a pleasure and great learning experience working with Vijaya, and her loss will be greatly felt by myself and countless others whose lives she touched.

**CYRIL F. KUDIABOR** *Assistant General Counsel, The City of New York,  
Office of Labor Relations; and Member, former Panel of Counsel*



Over the last few weeks I have been thinking about the impact Vijaya has had on so many different people. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry explained that love is looking “together in the same direction.” Vijaya seemed to approach each person and the problems that they brought to her from this perspective. She would identify so completely that one felt she understood the situation better than someone who was in the middle of a difficulty. Then she would do everything possible to obtain the best result. People felt Vijaya's acceptance of them and the intense focus and commitment to their concerns as a sign of her great capacity to love.

She felt things so intensely and suffered deeply from people's disappointments; however, she would not give up. She was always willing to try one more thing. If she felt something was right, she would try another approach to cajole someone into taking progressive action.

She was a true warrior in the best sense of the word. She always strove to be an instrument for good. She loved to be victorious for something she felt was right and yet was able to accept temporary setbacks as experiences to be learned from and transcended. I am sure now she will be finding ways to assist the good and beautiful and all those she loved from the new plane where her soul resides.

**ADHIRATHA KEEFE** *Member, former Panel of Counsel; English Channel swimmer;  
and Project Officer, Records and Archives Management Unit, UNICEF (retired)*

I worked with Catherine Vijaya Claxton for more than 20 years in the Panel of Counsel. I had the greatest admiration for her total dedication to her function. It was really much more than work for her; it was a sacerdotal activity. She devoted countless hours every day trying to help colleagues who were victims of the UN bureaucracy. Her generosity and devotion were exceptional and she will never be replaced.

**JOFRED GRINBLAT** *Volunteer Counsel, OSLA; and Member, former Panel of Counsel*



My contact with Catherine goes back to early 2004 when I requested assistance from the UN Panel of Counsel. I found in Catherine an officer in the very best sense supporting and guiding me in my case. Through her selfless work, Catherine has gained my profound respect and gratitude. She will be sorely missed by many colleagues in the UN and beyond. I shall remember Catherine Claxton forever!

**RAINER LESAR** *Former Director of UNMIK,  
Directorate of Infrastructure Affairs, Communications*



Vijaya was a wonderful person with a lot of vigor, energy and trust in her clients. I was one who felt privileged as she really tried to assist me more than expected. Moreover, she was a good listener and gave comfort at times when many of my UN colleagues had turned away. I am currently working for the European Union in Tbilisi, but my thoughts will be with her family and friends and colleagues in New York.

**GERARD FISCHER** *Client, former Panel of Counsel*

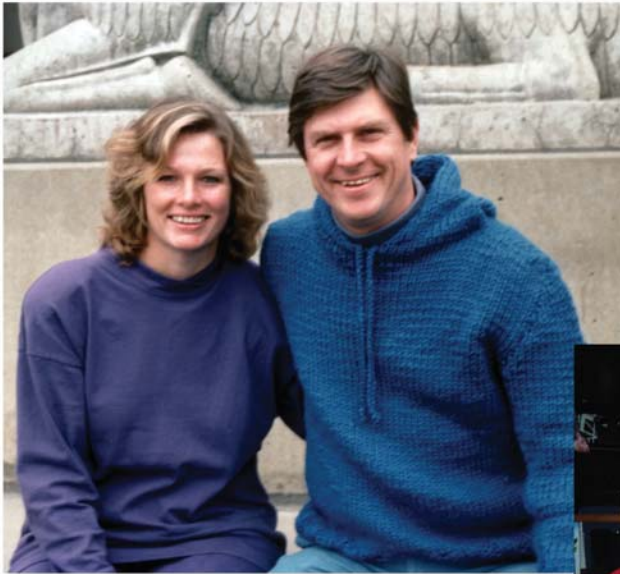


“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk...”

Only these words from Keats can truly express the pain I feel at the loss of our dear sister, Vijaya.

**GORDON H. TAPPER** *Chief, Facilities Management Service,  
Department of Management (retired)*





*Left: Vijaya with her brother, Keith Claxton, above, in California; and below, in Dover, England, in July 2007, two months before Vijaya's successful English Channel swim.*



*Above: Vijaya with her mother, Donna Fleming.*





*Vijaya sporting a Channel Swimming and Piloting Federation cap.*



*Vijaya communicating with her support crew before a training swim.*



*Vijaya serving as Master of Ceremonies at the Poetry Reading Celebrating the United Nations Year of the Dialogue Among Civilizations held at the United Nations, 29 March 2001.*



I was impressed by her care for the UN staff, her commitment to justice and her dedication to work beyond what was expected of her to reach this outstanding goal. This was a challenging job, but she did not yield and took up the challenge with confidence and belief. Colleagues are very proud of her great service, and she left us while being proud of all the good contributions she made. We are missing her greatly at this particular time of year when the sky opens up with blessings. Surely, she will be in a very good place before the Lord and she will be blessed by God.

**MORTEZA MIRMOHAMMAD** *Chief, Organizational Design and  
Classification Unit, Field Personnel Division, Department of Field Support*



I had the opportunity to work with Vijaya to try to help staff members struggling with substance abuse. Vijaya was compassionate. She worked with the energy of a true spiritual warrior. Vijaya helped me learn to negotiate, through her skills in mediation. I will not forget the day Vijaya invited me into her office to view the DVD of her swimming the English Channel. Over a cup of tea, she shared with me how she was feeling during each phase of her 22-hour swim. Vijaya is a strong example that we can accomplish whatever we set our intentions on.

**KEN DALEY** *UN Joint Staff Pension Fund, PES Section (retired)*



We were all very blessed to have Vijaya in our lives. She was always on the move and usually on someone else's behalf. She was a true live-wire — always onto something else, trying something new, climbing a higher mountain. I am very sorry to hear that she has left this world.

**MAUREEN OTTO** *UN Department of General Assembly and Conference Management*



Vijaya was a mentor, guide and spiritual big sister to me, like she was to many others. The last time I saw her, right before her retirement, I wanted to get advice on effecting a transformation in how the UN addresses external conflict prevention work, as she did with internal conflict work. Basically, she told me there is no secret; stay true to your vision and do it from a higher perspective, a spiritual perspective....not for one's own aggrandizement, but wholly for the cause. She really did incredible work despite so many challenges.

Vijaya was one of the strongest people I had ever met, physically (setting the record for the oldest American woman to swim the English Channel), mentally (figuring out and staying the course on moving the whole UN system, including the General Assembly to create the mas-

sive change of a new internal justice system), and spiritually (being a devoted disciple of Sri Chinmoy and upholding those standards unflinchingly). I just cannot believe there is a battle she lost, but not without a fight, the depths of which we cannot even imagine.

**GAY ROSENBLUM-KUMAR** *Secretary, Framework Team Bureau  
for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP*



I am deeply saddened by the news of Vijaya's passing, and would like to offer my sincere condolences to her family, friends and colleagues. I only met Vijaya a few times, but she immediately struck me as a genuinely kind and compassionate person. The world needs more like her.

**NICOLAS MORIN** *Security Advisor, World Food Programme, Rome*



Vijaya reminds me of the great architect who places the right people in the right place at the right time. The Panel of Counsel was the perfect place for Vijaya. She embodied the spirit of a great counselor. When you sat in front of her with a problem, you immediately sensed her empathy and desire to be of help. You walked away relieved and uplifted, knowing there was hope and a solution to your problem, and that Vijaya and the Panel of Counsel were with you. This Organization is so much richer for the dedicated and inspiring work of Vijaya and her staff.

Under the guidance of Vijaya, I have seen the Panel of Counsel blossom from a small seed into the beautiful flower that it is today: the Office of Staff Legal Assistance. Thanks, Vijaya, thanks for your great spirit of inspiration, dedication and love for your brothers and sisters. God bless Vijaya.

**ANSELMO EVANS** *Assistant Archivist,  
UN Archives and Records Management Service (retired)*



1947-2009

First comes the date of birth

Followed by a dash

Then comes the date we depart

What matters most in this life is not the date of our birth nor the date we depart this world

What matters most is HOW WE SPEND OUR DASH

I would like to share with you my impressions of my dear friend and colleague Vijaya, and more importantly, how I believe that she spent her DASH

To me, Vijaya “Catherine”, You Were

Loved<>Not liked,

Understood<>Misunderstood

This was the daily scene

Lived by Catherine

Humble<>outspoken

Sensitive<>in your face

Always addressing the issue at hand

As she thought deep down inside it should be

Accomplished artist

Accomplished athlete

The English Channel will

Not see the likes of a Vijaya

For a while, perhaps never

Because of her multi-talented

Multifaceted nature with

Multiple names, multiple friends

Multiple committee meetings

Multiple trainings

Multiple streams of output

Open in her own way to

Receiving inputs at times, yes

Ah, that, for me was my Vijaya

**MURIEL GLASGOW** *Member, former Panel of Counsel*



## There Is So Much to Do in Your Honour

Besides the many cakes,  
a small pot of berries to plant for the new spring  
named victory — after you —  
This is not sentiment.  
It is an urban salute to the Van Gogh beauty of your garden,  
one that could transfix  
with a palette of vibrant primary colors.  
So I will wear strong reds, yellows and blues — nothing lackluster.  
  
As much as I can, I will challenge the physical world,  
move forward on earth as if it were weightless stuff beneath the feet  
to be tapped down hard with the clackity-clack of high heels.  
And how your hug could bear witness to a maternal heart,  
I will have to pass that on —  
grip of affection and plain speak.  
  
Ah my friend, in a sheltered car ride,  
an hour's commute, I would shift the incomprehensible  
onto your strong swimmer's shoulders  
so I could kick back and daydream out the window.  
  
We, who too, will one day be warriors  
will miss your wise counsel.  
  
There is so much to do in your honour.

**BHIKSHUNI WEISBROT** *Vice-President, UNSRC Society of Writers; and UNDP staff member*



## Vijaya — Heroic Champion

To lift and inspire  
You courageously braved the fire  
Of forces undivine  
With your manner gracious and kind;  
Heroically you transcended  
Ruthless failure — unbended —  
And undaunted you strove,  
Into cold waters you dove  
To swim without ceasing —  
Your victory-delight increasing.