

Speech by Dato' Patricia Yoon-Moi Chia, Secretary-General at the  
"Stand Up-Speak Out" Appreciation Certificates and Awards  
Presentation Ceremony

23 November 2007, Colombo, Sri Lanka

H.E. Norberto Ramos Basilio,  
Dr Deshapriya Wijetunge, Director-General, Sri Lanka – United Nations  
Friendship organization,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

*Ayubowan,*

1. It is a great pleasure to address this gathering organized by the United Nations Friendship Organization on the theme of Colombo Plan's involvement in the eradication of poverty in the Asia & Pacific region including in Sri Lanka.

2. Firstly I wish to thank the Sri Lanka – United Nations Friendship Organization for this opportunity as the Guest of Honour at this "Stand Up-Speak Out" Appreciation Certificates and Award Presentation Ceremony to share with you the Colombo Plan's experience. As many of you are aware, Colombo Plan is one of the oldest inter-governmental organizations in the region. Colombo Plan was conceived in London, nurtured in Sydney, born in Colombo. It was established in 1951, for the cooperative economic and social development of countries in South and South East Asia. Starting with the membership of seven Commonwealth countries, its membership has now grown to 25 to include non-Commonwealth countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Japan and the US. Of course Colombo Plan still has many Commonwealth countries like Australia, New Zealand, SAARC countries and many ASEAN countries as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. The world today has deep poverty amid plenty. Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion—almost half—live on less than \$2 a day and 1.2 billion—a fifth—live on less than \$1 a day. These statistics do not auger well for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals of which the first goal is to halve poverty level by 2015.

4. The Colombo Plan is a partnership concept of self-help and mutual-help in development aimed at socio-economic development of our member countries in Asia and the Pacific. Let me now share with you how Colombo Plan activities help to alleviate poverty in our region.

5. Human resource is the single most important catalyst in a country's development & as a means for an individual to get out of the poverty cycle. Since inception, the CP has always placed its first priority on human resource development so as to build up the capacity to develop. From 1951 till 1991, the CP has provided about 300,000 scholarships to young citizens of developing member countries to pursue undergraduate and post graduate studies in donor member countries like Australia, United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand.

6. In 1995, Colombo Plan restructured its programmes to emphasize short-term training courses in targeted areas for the development of member countries. CP now has 4 programme areas to address the current needs of the member countries:

- i) Drug Advisory Programme - the oldest programme established since 1973
- 2) Programme for Public Administration (PPA) & Environment
- 3) Programme for private Sector Development (PPSD)
- 4) Long -term scholarships at Postgraduate level (revived since 2004)

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. There are strong connections between poverty and illicit drug use. Drug abuse is one of the bigger obstacles to development and poverty eradication. To address this issue, the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme (CPDAP) was launched in 1973. It was the first regional programme to address the drug abuse problem in the Asia-Pacific region. From its inception, the CPDAP has been contributing to the development of human resource in member countries by enhancing the capabilities of officials in government and non-governmental organizations involved in drug abuse prevention, control and treatment and aftercare.

8. Sri Lanka has 40,000 drug addicts according to official records. This figure is based on the arrests made by the police. However, this could only present the tip of the iceberg as illicit drug users could be more than 10 times the official figure. As a large portion of the income of a drug addict is spent on illicit drugs the welfare of the family is neglected. It may involve serving of family bonds, psychological problems and low job opportunities. Drug addiction leads to unemployment which in turn spiral towards deeper poverty. Not all marginalised

people will develop a drug problem, but those at the margins of society, such as the homeless and those in care, are most at risk.

In our efforts to train policy makers and care givers including NGOs in both demand and supply reduction of illicit drugs, the Colombo Plan has provided training for 6,471 participants since 1995, of whom 595 or about 9% are from Sri Lanka.

9. The Programme for Public Administration (PPA) has the objective to develop human capital in the public sector of the Colombo Plan developing member countries so as to enable them to steer the path of development of their countries. Our training programmes and workshops provide a venue for educators and practitioners to share expertise and experiences on the role public administration and environment in order to promote good governance and poverty alleviation. A key factor in targeting poverty reduction is a strong and effective administration with capable human capacity to implement effectively poverty eradication programmes. In this regard, the Colombo Plan has trained 1,232 participants since 1995, of whom 139 or 11% are from Sri Lanka.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. Poverty reduction will not be possible without rapid, sustained, and inclusive economic growth that provides opportunities for the poor to improve their lives. The private sector drives growth, creating income and employment opportunities for the poor. Poverty reduction requires strong efforts to address the needs of the private sector in developing countries. The CP Programme for Private Sector Development provides training for the development of industries, SMEs and international negotiations such as the WTO, technology transfer, business management and sharing of best practices current trends in trade which assist developing member countries increase their competitiveness and exports. This training aims to upgrade the capacity of public enterprises and those managers responsible for trade and export promotion. In many countries, enterprises continue to face barriers posed by complex and inefficient regulations; difficulties in accessing financial services, skills, knowledge, and technologies; or obstacles to selling goods and services in national, regional, or international markets. The PPSD aims to provide a more level playing field by equipping the people involved with the skills and capacity to address the aforementioned barriers. In this regard, the Colombo Plan has trained 1,053 participants since 1995, of whom 112 or 10% are from Sri Lanka.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. Another important milestone in the Colombo Plan was the establishment of the Colombo Plan Staff College for Technical Education which is presently based in Manila, Philippines. This was established in 1973 with its primary goal to enhance the growth and development of technician education system in developing member countries. Many Sri Lankans have benefited from the Staff College.

12. I'm afraid I now have to give a history lesson to you in terms of what the CP has implemented in Sri Lanka which assisted in the poverty eradication of the country.

13. In the early 1950s, the CP implemented the Gal Oya project which was one of the most important aspects of Sri Lanka's agriculture and river valley development. The Gal Oya Valley has benefited many thousands of people. In fact the scheme has brought about a steady improvement in the standard of living of tens of thousands of people within the Valley and the areas adjacent to it. As you may witness now new towns, villages have been carved out of the jungle. Over 80,000 acres are irrigated by the Gal Oya project. The contribution of this area to the national economy is in the fields of paddy production and there is a considerable saving on imports of rice. The project has helped thousands of families to overcome poverty. A sum of US\$ 1.6 million of foreign aid was contributed by the Colombo Plan out of the total investment of around US\$ 67.2 million. The rural electrification of the Gal Oya project was also under Colombo Plan aid which amounted to US\$ 774,500. In addition, equipment provided by Colombo Plan amounted to US\$ 210,000.

14. Hydro-electric schemes constructed in Sri Lanka under the Colombo Plan assistance in 1950-60s contributed towards rural poverty eradication in Sri Lanka. These hydroelectric schemes are in Castlereagh, Laksapahana, Maskeliya and Randenigala. The double curvature arch Victoria Dam was built with a generous grant of 113 million sterling pounds from the United Kingdom under the Colombo Plan. This was commissioned by Her Excellency Margaret Thatcher and the late President J R Jayawardene on 12 April 1985.

15. In 1963, Colombo Plan was able to mobilize funds from Canada to assist the then Ceylon to extend Katunayake Airport. In addition, in 1954, Canada through the Colombo Plan also donated diesel-electric locomotives to the then Ceylon Government Railway. I believe that 11 locomotives out of those 14 locomotives are still operational in Sri Lanka. As we all know infrastructure development like rail transport plays an important role in the opening up and development of a country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. In 1956, Colombo Plan together with the Government of Sri Lanka and FAO, established the Hardy Technical College. This institute provides "on the job training" in the fields of civil, mechanical, irrigation and electrical engineering as well as agriculture, survey, waterworks, woodwork etc. To further renew our support to this College, the Colombo Plan One in August 2005, by providing a sum of Rs. 1 million for Hardy Technical College. The CP utilized this funds to meet some of the most urgent needs of the College by donating shoe manufacturing machinery and other materials to the Institution. We believe this assistance will directly benefit the students of Hardy Technical College and help increase their income generating capacity after graduation.

17. The Colombo Plan is pleased to note that Sri Lanka and its people have benefited immensely from various training courses conducted by the Hardy Technical College over the years. Many now hold key positions in the public and private sectors.

18. All these projects are symbols of CP's commitment to raise the living standards of its member countries, particularly Sri Lanka which has hosted the CP for the last 56 years. Of the total 9,000 participants that were given scholarships for training by the CP since 1995, almost 10% are from Sri Lanka. It is our hope that with the development of human capacity, the CP programmes will pave the way to eradicate poverty in our region.

19. In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the awardees and record my sincere appreciation to all who have contributed to make this event a success.

Thank you.