

Making Colombo City a Centre of Excellence

Policy Platform of Milinda Moragoda, UPFA Candidate for Mayor

Colombo belongs to all Sri Lankans as it is the principal city of our nation. It is my dream to develop Colombo into an exemplary city, one which will serve as a model for the rest of the country. I am confident that working together, we can improve the lives of our citizens. Colombo is a microcosm of the nation, with a rich and diverse population mix. I intend to work closely with all sectors of society and to have an inclusive approach to policy-making and implementation. I will bring in a professional and capable administration, which will help ensure that Colombo is a well-run and functioning city, and a place where citizens of all communities and backgrounds feel safe and protected, where people can live and work with dignity and in peaceful co-existence.

The LTTE terror threat stifled and distorted the natural development of the City and degraded the living conditions of all who live in it. With the elimination of the terror threat, the government commenced work on developing Colombo and the surrounding areas. You have seen the walls coming down and the dredging commenced. These momentous improvements require coordination of multiple government agencies and initiatives and the mobilization of resources from all levels of government and the corporate sector as well as from international sources.

Having the trust of key decision makers, I will work cooperatively with government agencies and higher levels of government, in particular those under the Ministry of Defence, to solve your problems and develop Colombo to its full potential. It is time for us to move beyond politics and to put our City first and to elect our leaders based on their abilities and commitment to society. For, it is only then that we can develop our City into a centre of excellence, which will bring benefits to all.

I hereby commit to:

1.1 A CMC clean and efficient administration

- All necessary steps will be taken to streamline the CMC administration and make it efficient and transparent.
- Rules will be clarified, reducing room for abuse of discretion. Reasons for decisions will be provided and citizens will have the right to appeal decisions.
- Procurement procedures will be revised for transparency and local sourcing.
- Administrative procedures will be simplified and made more efficient, with a greater use of technology.
- CMC processes will be reengineered and decentralized for the convenience of citizens. Front office functions will be relocated at the six district offices of the CMC and back office functions

will be moved out from Town Hall to where employees live in the City, all connected through a wide area network.

- A Citizen's Charter including commitments on response times for service requests will be published and adhered to. Approvals of duly completed plans within one month will be the first step.
- There is a general dearth of women in leadership roles in the CMC. However, it is my firm belief that the entry of more women into local government will have a positive impact in improving work attitudes and in reducing corruption. Therefore, I will create a special programme to prepare women for leadership roles in consultation with the relevant organizations.
- Professionals will be appointed to standing and other committees in the spirit of the proposed amendments to the Municipal Councils Ordinance.

1.2 A CMC that places the emphasis on you the citizen

- We will ensure that front-office staff and field personnel will not only be cordial and friendly, but also discharge their duties with discipline and efficiency.
- I will establish a Municipal Call Centre modelled on the Government "1919" information call centre to better serve citizens. This centre will enable communication in all three official languages, both during and after regular office hours.
- A hotline will be established to take complaints regarding utility services and breakdowns and will, over time be coordinated with the electricity and water boards as well.
- The six CMC district offices will be further empowered through "e government," with the objective of eliminating the need to go to Town Hall altogether for the convenience of citizens and businesses.

1.3 Respect diversity and ensure co-existence

- I will regularly consult with spiritual leaders of all religions to seek their advice on matters which may impact on their communities and to discuss any of their concerns.
- I will create mediation mechanisms to resolve difficulties among groups related to religious issues.
- If a translator is needed to conduct official business in any municipal office or in any police station within the City, translation services will be provided over the phone. During office hours translators will be available in the main offices.
- Important historical religious sites of all faiths will be given priority in the urban beautification programmes to celebrate the cultural and religious diversity of Colombo that is a key ingredient in its identity and in recognition of their importance to our community life.

1.4 The Right to Information

- The Right to Information is a key mechanism to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability. It accords citizens the right to peruse any document pertaining to transactions entered into by the Council, be it a document pertaining to transactions entered into by the Council, be it in the awarding of tenders, the allocation of stalls in markets, contract agreements or the provision of housing units. It will enable citizens will to judge whether the affairs of the Council are conducted in a just and fair manner free of corruption.
- I will ensure that the Right to Information is recognized at the CMC, serving as a model for the entire country

1.5 Participation of Civil Society in local governance

- I will schedule regular open hours at the district offices so that you can have direct access to the Mayor and the relevant Municipal Councillors.
- I will establish non-partisan Community Development Committees at the neighborhood level to serve as the primary mechanism through which citizens communicate with City Government.
- The participation of civil society organizations to participate in service delivery and oversight will be encouraged and welcomed.
- I will ensure that women are included in all committees.
- Citizen committees will be involved at all stages of work process reengineering and will continue to oversee the implementation of policy.
- The vast experience and expertise of the private sector will be harnessed through public-private partnerships to help develop Colombo.

Through the above actions and with your active participation, I commit to make Colombo a Centre of Excellence. Outcomes will include:

2.1 A liveable City – Better living conditions for tenement dwellers

It is vital that those whose livelihoods are located in the City also reside in the City. This is beneficial to both society and the economy. However, the practice of condemning thousands of our citizens and their children to lives spent in sub-standard housing, sharing toilets and getting their water from stand pipes cannot continue. We have turned a blind eye to this tragedy for far too long.

The Government is committed to provide decent liveable housing to those now living in illegal structures on reservations and Government land. Within the next three years, 35,000 decent, livable housing units will be built within City limits by the Government. The CMC under my leadership will play an active role in this effort, ensuring that the interests of those being resettled are safeguarded.

- The Government has to relocate people in certain circumstances to fulfill its commitment to give decent, liveable housing, but **I will ensure that no citizen is relocated outside of metropolitan Colombo.**
- Before any relocation plans are made, communities will be included in the process and consulted.
- I will ensure that the CMC is closely involved in the design and operation of demonstration communities from which lessons can be drawn for the effective design and operation of new housing communities for those currently living in sub-standard conditions.

2.2 A flood-resilient City

The Government is taking urgent action to reduce the recurrence of floods in the City and suburbs.

- I will ensure that the CMC will work with citizens to identify local problem areas and devise remedies while collaborating with the Government to restore the canal system, increase catchments and implement other macro remedies. We need multi-billion rupee mega projects covering a much greater area than the City of Colombo in order to make our City flood resilient. Work under a fifteen billion rupee project has already commenced. The long-term success of these mega projects depends on ground-level actions such as clearing drains before the rainy season and preventing the illegal filling of wetlands.

2.3 A City that is easy to move around in

As befits a middle-income country, private vehicle ownership in the form of three wheelers, motor cycles and cars is increasing. As the road system is being reconfigured for increasing flows of traffic, the quality of life of those living in the City must not be compromised. Problems of traffic congestion cause not only inconvenience to road travelers, but health, too, is affected and businesses are hurt. It is essential that our public transportation system efficiently connects locations within the City so that it offers a viable alternative to private vehicles.

- I will ensure that pedestrians, especially the elderly and the disabled, will have well-maintained, even pavements to walk on and crosswalks that are respected by vehicular traffic.
- I will work with public and private-sector agencies to organize attractive circulator bus services with simplified fares on dedicated bus lanes that are being demarcated.
- I will work with the Government to implement mass-transit and parking solutions to further reduce the pressure of traffic from the suburbs.

2.4 A clean and healthy City

Good health is the greatest blessing. Health and poverty are intrinsically connected: poverty is both a cause and a consequence of poor health. Unhealthy living conditions, such as those found in the sub-standard housing the Government is determined to replace, have trapped some of our citizens in poverty. But in cities, the fates of the poor and the rich are intertwined. The same air pollution that makes a child in a tenement garden asthmatic also aggravates the condition of a resident of a condominium suffering from cardio-respiratory disease. Concerted action, combining resources from multiple levels of government, is needed to safeguard health.

- Parks within a two-kilometer walking distance of all citizens will be constructed or renovated. These will be connected by green corridors. Public areas along waterfronts including those along the Beira Lake will be developed starting next year.
- I commit to reduce air pollution from the present unacceptable levels. Vehicular traffic is responsible for 60 percent of air pollution in the City. Concerted action to reduce traffic congestion and enforce stricter emissions testing and enforcement will contribute to reducing respiratory and other diseases.
- I will ensure the CMC works with citizens to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes, thereby controlling the dengue menace. This will of course be supplemented by coordinated action with other levels of government.
- I will lead a concerted effort to extend sewerage services to all areas of the City, building upon the ongoing project to improve sewerage facilities that will end the discharge of raw sewage to the sea.
- The improvements made in clearing garbage will be consolidated. In consultation with citizens and waste-management workers, incentives to separate bio-degradable and other waste streams will be instituted. I will work with the Western Province Solid Waste Management Authority and other government agencies to prevent mountains of garbage from being built up.
- I will ensure that the CMC redoubles its efforts to ensure food safety within the City, involving vendors and consumers in a collaborative effort to ensure safe practices. A two-month publicity campaign on safe food practices will be followed by strict enforcement.
- The network of medical facilities operated by the CMC will be improved, beginning with a minimum of three municipal dispensaries upgraded as models. Based on systematic evaluation of their performance, all other facilities will also be improved.
- I will seek investments as well as assistance from donor agencies in order to implement programmes that would enhance the quality of life of the people of Colombo. With the concurrence of the Government. I will use my goodwill and relations with the international community and heads of donor agencies for this purpose.

2.5 A safe and enjoyable City

- While busy city streets and good street lighting help deter crime, a culture of dining out and entertainment creates jobs and helps make citizens feel connected to their City. The pent-up demand for outdoor recreation is evident in the public spaces opened up after the removal of the terror threat. Opportunities for entertainment and recreation will attract suburbanites during off-peak hours and weekends, enabling greater efficiencies in city services and expanded economic opportunities for businesses and small entrepreneurs.
- I will ensure that the demonstration beautification projects now being carried out along the Galle Road and in Independence Square are extended to all areas of the City for the enjoyment of all its citizens.
- I will work to expand opportunities for family recreation and entertainment including outdoor cafes and eating places.
- Maintenance of street lighting will be made a special priority, with a telephone number for receipt of complaints 24/7.
- I will ensure that the Police Stations within the City liaise with Community Development Committees to improve law and order at the neighborhood level. A comprehensive programme involving the Police and the CMC will be implemented to make Colombo a safe city.
- In collaboration with religious authorities, I will launch a campaign to end widespread drug and alcohol abuse, with particular emphasis on setting our children on the right path.
- In the course of providing a safe, enjoyable city experience for the citizens of Colombo, including opportunities for cultural expression and enjoyment, I will strive to create a unique identity for the City.

2.6 A City that nurtures and fosters its Youth

- I will develop a comprehensive programme to help the young people of Colombo between the ages of 18-28 to establish livelihoods that will include financial and technical assistance to help establish small businesses and develop the skills needed to find gainful employment. Paid work on city projects for a minimum number of days will be part of the programme. The objective is to have no one in this group idle.
- Private sector firms will be assisted and encouraged to recruit from within the City. Annual job fairs will be organized with private sector support.
- I will ensure that the facilities of community playgrounds, the community halls, libraries, and the children's parks will be upgraded. Three model community centres with gyms will be established. Children's playground equipment will be brought up to international standards, with an emphasis on safety.
- I will mobilize resources to ensure that all young people in the City have opportunities to participate in sports. Sport clubs will be revamped and a City soccer league reactivated.

2.7 A City for the 21st Century

With the end to the war, there remains much work to be done to continue the development of Colombo. The process is already underway. However, it is only with a competent local administration which has the trust of all stakeholders in the City, from citizens of all communities and income levels, to the private sector, and higher government that we can make Colombo reach its full potential. This will ensure that Colombo has the capacity to support the five hubs at the centre of the *Mahinda Chinthana Idiri Dekma* so that Sri Lanka in turn will become a major regional economic hub. The resulting jobs and the demand for additional services will benefit citizens and businesses of all sizes, of Colombo, as well as of the rest of the country.

- I commit to work with the government to ensure that the necessary investments are made in the urban infrastructure of Greater Colombo, such as the ring roads and solid waste disposal facilities, to enable Colombo to become a vibrant, dynamic centre of excellence.

This policy programme is meant to be an evolving document. We will incorporate the ideas and suggestions of citizens whom we meet and interact with throughout the campaign. The programme will be finalized and issued with your input before the election. We will be reaching out directly as well through various social media platforms to engage with as many citizens as possible to hear their views.

I welcome you to join the dialogue. Get in touch with us at:

tel: 011 4020635 office: 8/30 Siddhartha Road, Colombo 6

email@milinda.org www.ourcmb.com

on **twitter** : @milindamoragoda