



THE COLOMBO PLAN

for Co-operative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific

Message from the Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka Hon. Dr. Harini Amarasuriya



As we mark the 75th anniversary of the Colombo Plan, it is a moment to reflect on the profound impact this initiative has had on the economic and social development of Asia and the Pacific. Since its inception in 1951, the Colombo Plan has grown from a group of seven nations to an organisation of 26 member countries, all united by the common goal of uplifting the lives of their people.

The Colombo Plan's foundation on the principles of self-help and mutual assistance has been instrumental in fostering human resource development across its member states. This partnership has enabled countries to confidently navigate their development paths, contributing to good governance and effective policymaking.

Over the years, the Colombo Plan has demonstrated remarkable adaptability, evolving its programmes to meet the changing needs of its member countries. This flexibility has ensured that it remains a relevant and unique development organisation, capable of addressing contemporary challenges.

As Sri Lanka continues its journey of economic and social renaissance, I am confident that the enduring bond between Sri Lanka and the Colombo Plan, rooted in our shared history and mutual aspirations, will undoubtedly continue to be a force for progress and development.

I extend my best wishes for the continued success and strength of the Colombo Plan, as it leads its member states and the world towards a brighter future.

Message from the President of The Colombo Plan Council H.E. Trinh Thi Tam



It is my great honour to convey warm congratulations to the Colombo Plan on the occasion of its 75th anniversary. For three-quarters of a century, the Colombo Plan has served as a unique platform for cooperation among Member Countries, guided by the enduring principles of self-help and mutual help.

Looking ahead, the Colombo Plan will need to continue strengthening cooperation among its Member Countries as it responds to emerging challenges and new opportunities. Greater engagement, the exchange of experience, and practical partnerships will be important in ensuring that the organization remains relevant and continues to serve its members effectively.

There will also be value in maintaining a strong focus on areas such as capacity-building, human capital development, and public sector strengthening, as well as cooperation in addressing transnational challenges. Continued participation and contributions from Member Countries will play an important role in supporting the Colombo Plan's work and its impact across the region.

This anniversary holds particular significance for Viet Nam as we are honoured to hold the current Presidency of the Colombo Plan Council. It is a privilege to serve the organization at this important milestone in its distinguished history and to contribute to advancing its shared vision of regional cooperation and sustainable development.

Viet Nam has greatly benefited from the Colombo Plan's programmes and initiatives over the years, particularly in the areas of human resource development, capacity-building, technical cooperation, and institutional strengthening. We remain deeply appreciative of the Colombo Plan's enduring support and its positive contribution to Viet Nam's development journey.

As President of the Colombo Plan Council, I am encouraged by the continued engagement and commitment of Member Governments. The strength of the Colombo Plan lies in this shared sense of purpose and the willingness to contribute to one another's progress. Viet Nam remains firmly committed to working closely with all Member Countries, the Secretary-General, and the Secretariat to further strengthen the organization, enhance its effectiveness, and ensure that it continues to respond to the evolving needs and aspirations of its members.

I would also like to commend the outgoing Secretary-General, Dr Benjamin P. Reyes for his dedicated leadership, unwavering commitment, and valuable contributions to advancing the work of the Colombo Plan over the past years. Together with the Secretariat, he has played an important role in strengthening the organization and promoting cooperation among its Member Countries. I extend my sincere appreciation for his service and wish him every success in his future endeavours.

At the same time, I look forward to working closely with the incoming Secretary-General, Mrs. Chulamanee Chartsuwan and the Secretariat to build upon this strong foundation and to further advance the Colombo Plan's mission in close partnership with all Member Countries.

As we mark this important milestone, I extend my best wishes for the continued success of the Colombo Plan and look forward to its continued contribution to regional cooperation in the years ahead.

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Message from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka Hon. Vijitha Herath



It gives me great pleasure to extend my warm greetings and congratulations to the Colombo Plan on the occasion of its 75th Anniversary.

As a founding member and host country of the Colombo Plan, Sri Lanka takes immense pride in its longstanding association with this esteemed organization and its enduring contribution to regional cooperation, capacity-building and sustainable development.

The 75th Anniversary of the Colombo Plan is not only a celebration of its rich legacy, but also a recognition of its continued relevance and resilience in an evolving global landscape. Since its establishment in 1951, the Colombo Plan has served as a valuable platform for partnership and collaboration among its Member Countries, fostering economic and social development through sharing of knowledge, expertise and best practices.

Over the past seven and half decades, the Colombo Plan has played a significant role in advancing the development of its Member Countries. Guided by its founding principles of self-help and mutual assistance, the Organization has continuously adapted to emerging challenges and opportunities while remaining steadfast in its commitment to regional progress. Its flagship initiatives, including the Drug Advisory Programme and the Capacity Building Programme, continue to make meaningful contributions to strengthening institutions, enhancing human capital and addressing contemporary development priorities, in the participating countries.

As the international community confronts increasingly complex and interconnected challenges, the Colombo Plan is well positioned to further enhance its role as a dynamic and forward-looking platform for development cooperation. Through stronger partnerships, innovation and knowledge-driven solutions, it can continue to support inclusive, sustainable and people-centered development.

Sri Lanka remains firmly committed to the vision and objectives of the Colombo Plan and looks forward to continuing its close engagement with the Organization in promoting cooperation and dialogue among its Member Countries.

On this landmark occasion of its 75th anniversary, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to the Council Members, the Secretary-General and the staff of the Colombo Plan Secretariat for their dedication and service. I also extend my heartfelt congratulations to all Member Countries on this historic milestone and my best wishes for the continued success of the Colombo Plan in the years ahead.

Message from the Secretary-General of The Colombo Plan H.E. Chulamanee Chartsuwan



Seventy-five years is a long time in the life of any institution – long enough to have witnessed the world remade from post-World War reconstruction to globalization and then deglobalization. That the Colombo Plan has endured through all of it, and endured with purpose, is not something to be taken lightly.

The Colombo Plan was founded on a simple but radical idea: that the nations of this region could do more for and together with one another, through the principles of self-help and mutual help, than they could do alone. That idea – captured in three words that remain our compass, Planning Prosperity Together – has proven resilient and even more meaningful today. The journey has not always been smooth. Institutions survive not by standing still, but by knowing when to adapt and having the courage to do so. The Colombo Plan has done that, and will continue to do so.

The story we celebrate today belongs to every member state, donor, and partner – past and present – who have helped shape what this organisation has become. I am equally grateful to the Government and people of Sri Lanka, whose hospitality has given our Secretariat a home for seventy-five unbroken years. That too is no small thing.

I have taken office, with gratitude for the trust of all members, on the very day that this organization is celebrating its 75th anniversary. It is also a challenging moment. The region and the world are navigating changes of unusual depth and speed to which policy framework is still struggling to keep pace. The architecture of international cooperation is being tested in ways that call for patience, wisdom, and renewed commitment to dialogue. In such times, an institution like the Colombo Plan – trusted, experienced, and politically unencumbered – has a role more vital than before.

My intention is to work closely with all member states, partners, and stakeholders to ensure that this organisation remains fit for the challenges ahead – not only in its structures, but in its thinking and its partnerships. Reform must be pursued thoughtfully and with purpose, in service of the peoples the Colombo Plan exists to serve. The next chapter, as with the last seventy-five years, will depend on the continued trust and collective commitment of all who believe in our shared mission.

Seventy-five years on, the founding conviction holds. Here is to the next chapter of Planning Prosperity Together.

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Member	Year of accession	Member	Year of accession
Afghanistan	1963	The Maldives	1963
Australia	1950	Mongolia	2004
Bangladesh	1972	Myanmar	1952
Bhutan	1962	Nepal	1952
Brunei Darussalam	2008	New Zealand	1950
Fiji	1972	Pakistan	1950
India	1950	Papua New Guinea	1973
Indonesia	1953	The Philippines	1954
Iran	1966	Saudi Arabia	2012
Japan	1954	Singapore	1966
Republic of Korea	1962	Sri Lanka	1950
Lao PDR	1951	Thailand	1954
Malaysia	1957	Vietnam	2004

THE COLOMBO PLAN AT SEVENTY-FIVE

In January 1950, Colombo became the first Asian city to host a Commonwealth conference on foreign affairs. Out of those deliberations came an idea that two men proposed separately and the conference fused into one. Australia's Percy Spender urged that the developed Commonwealth countries supply technical assistance to the developing nations of the region. Ceylon's J.R. Jayewardene proposed that they provide capital as well. The conference agreed to do both. A Consultative Committee was formed to survey what the region needed and what, between its members, it already had.

The idea became an institution over the following months. It was to be called the Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia. Members agreed that assistance should not be confined to the Commonwealth. On 1 July 1951, the Plan was formally launched. Its seven founding members were all Commonwealth realms—Australia, Britain, Canada, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), India, New Zealand and Pakistan—but the door was already open for non-Commonwealth countries as well.

Assistance was arranged bilaterally, member to member, and coordinated from a small Bureau in Colombo that answered to a council of the members themselves. Through its first two decades the Plan put much of its weight behind infrastructure and the skillings of a workforce, on a principle it has never abandoned and still names today—self-help and mutual help. Trainees and students went abroad on fellowships, advisers assigned where they were wanted, equipment supplied to build the roads, power, telecommunications and irrigation that the region's economies lacked. The most telling sign of its working was that several countries which began as recipients, had by the 1980s become donors in their turn.

The Plan also widened its purpose. As drug dependency spread through a region that sat between two of the world's three largest sources of narcotics—the Golden Triangle of Myanmar, Thailand and Lao PDR, and the Golden Crescent of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan—the members established a Drug Advisory Programme at a meeting in Wellington. It was the first international body created to confront substance abuse in the Asia-Pacific. A Staff College for technician education followed. The Plan was no longer only a clearing-house for bilateral aid; it was building shared institutions its members ran together.

Then it nearly ended. In 1989 the Technical Co-operation Scheme that had been the Plan's core came to an abrupt halt, and in November 1991 two of its founding members, Britain and Canada, announced their withdrawal. The foundation shook. The world had changed since 1951: the United Nations system had matured, development banks and bilateral aid agencies had multiplied, and the "East Asian Miracle" had lifted several members so far that they needed little external help. Other agencies were now doing much of what the Plan had once done almost alone. The question its members faced was stark, and the official history puts it plainly—whether to end or to endure.

They chose to endure, and to change. In January 1995 Dr Kim Hak-Su of the Republic of Korea took charge, arriving with a pledge of financial backing. Reforms followed. The chief officer was redesignated Secretary-General; Bureau became Secretariat; new Constitution was adopted. The institution that had been built for South and Southeast Asia began to carry its experience further, into Africa, into Latin America as a practitioner of South-South cooperation. Over the following two decades it grew into something its founders could not have foreseen: a global leader in drug demand reduction, training and accrediting personnel across continents.

Seventy-five years is long enough to judge an institution by its record rather than its intentions. The Colombo Plan's record runs from a small room in Colombo and a six-year plan on paper to a membership that learned to teach one another, weathered the loss of its founders, and remade itself without abandoning the premise it was built on. It was always, at bottom, an arrangement a region made among its own members. That it has lasted three-quarters of a century on an idea is the achievement the 75th anniversary marks.

As H.E. Chulanee Chatsuwarn assumes office today as the 9th Secretary-General of the Colombo Plan, we look forward to her leadership in guiding the institution into its next decade. We wish her every success in the years ahead.



THE COLOMBO PLAN

Tracing 75 Years of Unparelled Excellence

1950

The Founding: Beginnings of a great human adventure

Mar 1951

The first movement of aid
Six Ceylonese women board a flight to New Zealand to train as dental nurses on a two-year course. The first tangible delivery under the Colombo Plan.

GROWTH

1952-1971

1969

The Colombo Plan Gets a flag
Flag is presented in Canada at the Victoria Consultative Committee Meeting in October 1969. It will fly in Asia for the first time at the Manila meeting of February 1971.

Infrastructure revival and workforce skilling

A 20-year summary:

35.8 USD 35.8 billion in capital assistance, USD 1.7 billion in technical assistance

MATURITY & DRIFT

1972-1994

Expansion, consolidation, crossroads

1973

Drug Advisory Programme is launched



At the 23rd Consultative Committee Meeting in Wellington, New Zealand, the Plan establishes the first international programme dedicated to fighting substance abuse in the Asia-Pacific.

1973

Colombo Plan Staff College opens in Singapore

23rd Consultative Committee Meeting also adopts the memorandum of understanding for the Staff College.

1977

A new name

Under a revised constitution, the Plan is renamed The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific.

1980

The Plan gets an indefinite lifespan

At the 28th Consultative Committee meeting in Jakarta, the Plan's lifespan is extended indefinitely, obviating the need for five-year renewals.

1995

Dr Kim Hak-Su takes office in January 1995

The Republic of Korea's Dr Kim Hak-Su becomes the first Secretary-General of the revitalised Colombo Plan.

2001

The Plan turns 50

A children's art competition across member countries marks the 50th anniversary. 296 entries received; displayed at the 38th Consultative Committee meeting in Colombo.

1996

Sri Lanka host-country status formalised

A Memorandum of Understanding grants the Colombo Plan status equivalent to international and inter-governmental missions.

2024

The Colombo Plan Foundation is created

2026

The Chulabhorn Graduate Institute, Thailand signs a Record of Discussions for Cost-Sharing Sponsorship in May 2026.



1 July 2026

75 years of advancing shared progress



The Colombo Plan Secretariat

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J.R. JAYEWARDENE
Co-author of the Colombo Plan

"The Marshall Plan was aid given by one country, America, to several. A plan on similar lines for South-East Asia could not find such a generous giver. I thought however that the idea was worth pursuing."

PERCY SPENDER
Co-author of the Colombo Plan

"Long before the war had ended, I had been deeply concerned with the inevitable post-war problems that would beset this vast area with its ever-increasing population pressures and disturbed by the failure and reluctance on the part of more fortunate nations to assist in resolving these problems in a manner which held out any real hope for people whose lives had encouraged them to entertain little expectation of betterment of their lot."

G.M. WILSON
First Director of the Colombo Plan Bureau

"I arrived in Colombo to take charge of the Bureau in August 1951. It had started functioning a few months earlier under the interim guidance of E.J. Toogood... We were housed, thanks to the generosity of the Government of Ceylon, in the Secretariat building... In those early days when we were still trying to find our feet there was plenty to keep us occupied both in the office itself and in our journeyings around our parish."

ALAN STRACHAN
Eighth Director of the Colombo Plan Bureau

"A thread running through the development story under the Colombo Plan is Technical Assistance. Throughout the years, changes in the scope of programmes, both to broaden and accelerate development, have been effected... The progress I was able to observe, the desire of people to help themselves, the search for knowledge, both academic and technical, was heart warming."

JOHN RYAN
16th Director of the Colombo Plan Bureau

John Ryan described the first two or three years of his time in Colombo as "times of great emptiness". Just before John Ryan ended his term as director, the shape of the modern Colombo Plan was being discussed in Seoul in late 1994. "Seoul was a rich reward for those empty years when there was nothing to do, and I went home to New Zealand in good heart - we had pulled it off."

DR KIM HAK-SU
First Secretary-General of the Colombo Plan Secretariat

"The new life of the organisation was not in the hands of donor countries but rather in the hands of recipient developing countries."