

Be the Change You Want To See... Let Caloocan Shine!

A State of the City Address by

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Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me first of all to refresh your memory about Caloocan's reputation and image as a city prior to my administration in 2004.

Years ago, Caloocan City had a reputation for being crime-infested, grossly underdeveloped and mismanaged, where vice and gang wars were prevalent. Prior to 2004, the city's revenues barely increased. I had inherited a tremendous amount of obligations from my predecessor to the tune of nearly two billion pesos. There was limited infrastructure, undeveloped and bumpy roads, lack of classrooms, and other necessary public facilities. Worse, public service was relegated to the background. A large percentage of the city's population was hardly being reached by the city government. In other words, Caloocan was a place where growth and development seemed to have stopped for many years. *Napag-iwanan na tayo ng ating mga karatig na lungsod.* And that was the big challenge and responsibility that you, the people of Caloocan, has placed upon my shoulders.

Now, barely five years later, the people of Caloocan have many reasons to feel proud about their city.

The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation has named Caloocan City among the most business-friendly cities in the Philippines. Being home to a good number of motorcycle dealers, the city is now also known as the "Motorcycle Capital of the Philippines".

In terms of revenue, we have registered a yearly increase of 12.29%, more than double the average of 5.45% in the previous administrations. In fact, our accumulated increase in total income from 2004 to 2008 is far greater than the total annual income of other cities in Metro Manila.

We have earned the distinction of being Top Taxpayer in the Government category, an award granted by the Bureau of Internal Revenue based on promptness of payments and

growth rates. As a city, I am proud to say that we have contributed to achieve the revenue collection goals of our country.

In four years, we have successfully wiped out almost a hundred percent of the city's huge outstanding obligations incurred by the past administrations. Our Meralco debts alone which reached P32 million has now been completely paid.

We have infused much-needed funds for various infrastructure -- more than P2 billion were appropriated for school buildings, roads, pathwalks and footbridges, streetlights, covered courts, barangay halls and multi-purpose facilities, day care and health centers, improvement of water services, drainage canals, and various other facilities in a span of merely four years. That's an average of P500 million a year.

Currently, Caloocan holds the distinction of being the Second Cleanest City in Metro Manila, Marikina being the first. But considering the disparity in population and land area, Marikina is a city of only 479,000 people and a land area of 21.5 square kilometres. Compare this to Caloocan's 53 square kilometres and a population of close to 1.5 million.

Apart from that, our city has received the "Out of the Box" Award from the Mother Earth Foundation for our efforts and innovative solutions in ecological solid waste management. Let me take this opportunity therefore, to thank our barangay officials who fully cooperated in the implementation of our Materials Recovery Facility Program and helping reduce Caloocan's garbage by as much as 27%. This Award is for you.

During this administration, we have also seen the transformation of Northern Caloocan, previously a much-neglected portion of Metro Manila, into a revitalized and developed community because of the improved road networks.

In terms of public service, we are perhaps among the fastest to respond and most sensitive to the needs of the public. This is because we have an efficient instant feedback mechanism in the form of text messaging. I believe this is seldom done in most cities.

From being a seat of criminality, Caloocan has now transformed into a peaceful, orderly and responsible community due to our generous logistical support to our police force. In fact, the 40 units of mobile patrol cars we have provided, apart from communication equipment, was the single biggest purchase ever made by a local government unit for a police department.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these figures are just the beginning of the breakthroughs we have achieved so far.

As an important backgrounder to the Report you will hear today, allow me first to show you the BIG PICTURE of what we are dealing with in our continuous efforts for Caloocan:

The population of Caloocan is approximately 1.5 million. Our biggest barangay has a population even greater than that of some cities in Metro Manila. We are the third most highly populated city in the country.

	Population	Land Area
QC	2.6 million	166 square kms
Manila	1.6 million	38.6 square kilometers
Caloocan	1.5 million	53.3 square kilometres

We also have the second biggest land area, and the second highest number of barangays, at 188, among the cities in Metro Manila. Furthermore, a big portion of this population needs to be rescued from poverty.

Thus, the challenge faced by the City Mayor of Caloocan is many times greater than that in other cities. But be that as it may, it is my pride and honor to report to you the following breakthroughs we have accomplished in the past year:

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

The renewed and increased business confidence in this administration has resulted in an unprecedented 115% increase in revenue from businesses from 2004 to 2008, representing an increase of P404 million or a total collection of P754 million for the year 2008. Compared to the 8,000 registered businesses in the previous administration, the number immediately rose to 13,000 when my administration took over. Now, registered businesses in Caloocan are at least 14,300. Indeed, we can proudly say that we are on the verge of a business boom in Caloocan. To name just a few of the new business establishments that have joined us, we have Puregold, Kabayan Hotel, Manila North Tollways Corporation, car dealers Hino, Suzuki and Kia Motors; Among the banks, Maybank, Equicom, Rural Bank of Makati, Sterling Bank, Philippine Business Bank and Citibank Savings. We also have new subdivision developers, such as the Eton Group of Companies and Filinvest Realty.

We have institutionalized a "One-Stop-Shop" for business permits which streamlined the application process. Caloocan City was the very first LGU to be connected to the Online Philippine Business Registry, where all agencies of government involved in the business registration process are interconnected. Now, with several easy steps through the Internet, the process of business registration in Caloocan has become quick and convenient. Thus,

Caloocan was ranked No. 2 by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation for having the least number of procedures to start a business, among 21 other cities.

Due to the city's healthier financial outlook, my administration was able to settle more than P1.3 billion in arrears and various obligations incurred by the previous administrations. Moreover, we are now less dependent on our internal revenue allotment (or IRA). Fifty-two (52%) percent of our budget are derived solely from revenues. In contrast, prior to my administration, more than half of the city's budget was dependent on the IRA.

We have spent an average of 78% of our total income over the past five years to socio-economic development programs and projects, far exceeding the minimum 20% required by law.

It is also my administration that has taken the initiative to depart from the old, slow manual system of processing transactions. With the computerization of our office systems, there is now greater speed, transparency, accuracy and more convenience for our taxpayers.

And for the first time in its history, Caloocan was recognized by the Commission on Audit for being first in the submission of its financial statements.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

As of last year, we have been able to construct more than 187 kilometers of roads, compared to the 38 kms constructed in nine years by the previous administration. This is tantamount to a highway from Monumento to Urdaneta, Pangasinan which is just 30 minutes away from Baguio, as compared to the previous administration's road kilometrage which reach only as far as Bulacan from Monumento.

We have transformed previously bumpy, almost impassable roads into what they are today – like the Zapote Road, Zabarte and Calamansian Roads in the north, and Tullahan and Sabalo Roads in the south, to name just a few.

We have constructed and repaired 130 kilometers of cemented pathwalks and some 93.2 kilometers of drainage worth P200 million. We have upgraded Meralco's existing streetlights.

We have built close to 300 classrooms in five years. This is a far cry from the 34 classrooms constructed by the previous administration in nine years. Last year and early this year alone, we have inaugurated new schoolbuildings, which reduced the classroom to

students ration from one is to 85 to to one is to 50, despite the fact that our student population increases at a fast rate every year.

Nowadays, our barangays need not share a basketball court or multi-purpose facility with 11 other barangays. Our youth and children used to play in the streets, exposed to the danger of passing motor vehicles. Now, with the 90 covered courts and several more under construction, we have provided a venue for sports activities, barangay assemblies and other community meetings. Within school campuses, we have also constructed about 24 covered courts where students need not suffer the heat of the sun while doing their various activities.

We have spent P65.6 million in the construction and maintenance of 102 deepwells and water pumps particularly in North Caloocan, where residents had no water supply.

We have built at least 28 day care centers, health centers and other public buildings to the tune of P111.8 million. These serve the needs of thousands of our constituents.

QUALITY EDUCATION

Prior to my administration in 2004, Caloocan City ranked #14 out of 14 cities in the National Education Achievement Tests in the National Capital Region. Today, we rank #3. This is because we devoted a big part of our city's total income to the management and development of educational institutions. We also supported our teachers through foreign and local training, scholarship grants and increased their augmentation allowance by fifty percent.

This administration has shown just how much we value our students' education by providing instructional materials, computers, and multi-media equipment for the schools. During the recent graduation exercises, I made sure that parents need not be burdened by too much expenses by providing the togas and sound systems for the graduation programs.

The impact of our support can be seen from how well our students performed in their academic and extra-curricular activities. Students from our very own University of Caloocan City have been winning in academic competitions against colleges and universities from other cities. The number of those who passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers, the Criminologist Licensure Examination and the CPA Board Examination have likewise increased.

This schoolyear, I shall be launching the so-called SIKAT or Simulan ang Karunungan sa Tahanan Program.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Beneficiaries of our health care services have likewise increased by more than a hundred percent, particularly in our child care, maternal care, and cancer control programs. In four years, we were able to conduct 331 medical missions, in contrast to only 38 medical missions under the previous administration.

Recently, we have acquired two state-of-the-art mobile clinics fully-equipped and manned by licensed medical personnel to give free consultations, medicines and first aid particularly to the farthest barangays. These mobile clinics, which are built inside six-wheeler Isuzu vans, are capable of providing minor surgical procedures, contraceptives procedures, dental care, pre- and post-natal care, medical consultations, immunizations and laboratory tests. They are equipped with everything from a high-tech dental chair to an ECG machine. As far as I know, Caloocan is one of the very few cities fortunate enough to own these.

These are apart from, and complementing, our 51 health centers and barangay health stations operating all over the city. We have established 150 Botikas ng Barangay – the most number established by an LGU.

We have successfully transformed our local hospital, the President Diosdado Macapagal Memorial Medical Center or the PDMMMC, into a modernly equipped facility. Last year alone, we have spent over P10 million in modern hospital equipment. Thus, it has been upgraded by the Department of Health and Philhealth into a tertiary, level four hospital.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you might recall that when I first became Mayor, this hospital could hardly be used for lack of facilities. Now, the PDMMMC is being recognized. Last year, it received a "Very Good" rating from the Public Service Delivery Audit of the Civil Service Commission, as well as a Scroll of Honor from the Philippine National Red Cross. Aside from frequent blood donations, we have been providing free laboratory services, as well as free surgical procedures including Operation Restore Hope for cleft lip/ palate operations, Operation Tule and free cataract operations.

Early this year, we have procured two new units of ambulance cars for the hospital, complete with modern accessories.

Caloocan City was the first LGU to hold the annual Buntis Congress, an assembly that tackles mother and child health.

Our veterinary services have likewise accomplished a hundred percent more than in the previous administration, in terms of providing free consultations, vaccination of animals and confiscation of "double dead" or "hot" meat. To enhance our veterinary services, we

have constructed the first City Animal Pound in North Caloocan. This pound is equipped to handle 300 animals at a time.

The Sangandaan Cemetery, which used to be a den of drug users and illegal settlers, has improved considerably with the construction of perimeter walls, installation of sufficient lighting, 24-hour security, and relocation of illegal dwellers.

PUBLIC ORDER AND SAFETY

One of the most visible changes observed by the people when I took over the reins of the city was the big improvement in traffic flow. My administration seeks to sustain this improvement in traffic through an excellent traffic management scheme and the implementation of RED Zones or the Recom Echiverri Discipline Zones. *[We have also set up additional traffic lights in critical areas and installed traffic signages where necessary].*

Recently, we have furnished our traffic enforcers with 16 additional patrol motorcycles. *[We have fielded 722 trained traffic enforcers with the help of the RECOM Riders composed of about 3,000 motorcycled volunteers.]*

In previous years, the prevalence of colorum tricycles had been a perennial problem for the city. Only 20% of the city's tricycles used to renew their franchises every year. Now, through sheer political will, we have successfully implemented a "Zero Colorum" Drive and legalized 95% or a total of 1,228 colorum tricycles. Moreover, our city boasts of the fastest process of renewing tricycle permits --- from the previous two weeks, to as fast as 30 minutes.

On the other hand, aside from the 40 units of mobile patrol cars and communication equipment we have provided for our police force, we have subsidized the needs of our police personnel at P350 thousand a month, or a total of P4.2 million a year. This has enhanced police competence and earned for them the recognition as one of the Best Police Stations, as well as the Most Outstanding Responder Award.

[In the previous years, we have also provided motorcycle patrol vehicles and multicabs to our barangays as our support to their peace and order initiatives].

PUBLIC WELFARE AND BASIC SERVICES

To date, we have already helped find jobs for 38,000 job seekers, more than double than in the nine years of the past administration. Our Job Fairs are touted to be one of the biggest in Metro Manila, where more than 4,200 have been hired on the spot.

We have provided free skills and livelihood training for close to 50,000 since the start of the Recom Administration. As a whole, I am pleased to report that we have created an impact on the lives of some 300,000 families whose breadwinners we have trained and helped to find jobs.

We have helped provide lots for 10,700 families through 134 community mortgage programs. We have served thousands through our various intervention programs, such as the Food for School Program, Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, Petron Tulong Aral Program, the Solo Parent Program, the Pantawid Koryente: Katas ng VAT Program, the Subsidized NFA Rice Program, the Self-Employment Assistance Program, the Tulong Pangkabuhayan Para Sa Displaced Worker (TUPAD), the Workers' Income Augmentation Program (WINAP), and the Workers Entrepreneurial Program (Workrep).

We have continued to extend priority to the health and welfare of our senior citizens. About a hundred percent of our estimated senior citizen population have received senior citizens' cards, and medical and grocery discount booklets.

Caloocan City was among the first to implement the Mobile Passport Services, surpassing common expectations with the release of passports in just one hour. This was a first in the history of Philippine passporting. Along with the Operation Birthright, our Mobile Passport Services has helped thousands in securing their birth certificates and passports, as we took the functions of our civil registry department right into the barangays.

Meanwhile, our Kasalang Bayan has exceeded records for the biggest number of couples exchanging marriage vows simultaneously. Thus far, we have solemnized the marriages of 9,388 couples. Moreover, Caloocan has garnered another first in being the only local government to conduct a Mass Islam Wedding.

In terms of providing one of our most basic needs -- that is, water -- I am pleased to report that our Patubig or waterworks system has sufficiently fulfilled its purpose as a provisional and transitory relief for our constituents who are not yet being served by Maynilad.

Sports and physical competitions likewise remain a priority of the Recom Administration. As president of the Caloocan chapter of Little League Philippines, I'm pleased to report that our team has earned honors by representing the NCR in the Palarong

Pambansa. Caloocan's junior basketball team, on the other hand, has twice made it to the finals of the Junior PBA.

OUR PLANS FOR CALOOCAN'S FUTURE

Ladies and Gentlemen, in three years Caloocan will be marking its 50th or Golden Year. With the unprecedented progress we have achieved in so short a time, it is not difficult to believe that we could do more. Indeed, we could do better.

Let us rekindle our dream to make Caloocan one of the premiere cities of our country. Let us revive Caloocan's place in history. As modern Katipuneros, I envision the people of Caloocan to be known as the generation that beat the odds, and attained victory through economic and social reforms.

In the future, I envision a city with vigorous economic growth. We have therefore revised the old land use and zoning plan for Caloocan to accommodate more commercial and industrial zones, without neglecting access roads to subdivisions and spaces for parks and recreational zones.

In the future, I envision a city achieving a zero waste status due to an efficient waste management program.

In the future, I envision a 1 is to 40 classroom to student ratio, as we put up more school buildings.

In the future, I envision a sports center in the heart of the city.

In the future, I envision a fully equipped hospital in the bukid area.

In the future, I envision a new 18-storey state-of-the-art City Hall building in the Grace Park area, which shall house additional government facilities, offices, and one-stop shops.

In the future, I envision a City Hall run with the efficiency and competence of a private corporation -- but with a big difference -- it serves with a heart and a conscience.

My beloved citizens of Caloocan, let us remember that we are doing all of these for future generations.

As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change you want to see in the world". Let Caloocan reflect the change we want to see in the rest of the world.

As the Father of our city, likewise I agree with Mahatma Gandhi when he said: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others".

Mabuhay ang Caloocan!

RECCOM