



Statement by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
44th Session of the Human Rights Council
Agenda Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

06 July 2020

Madam President,

Sri Lanka welcomes the report presented by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants.

The contribution of migrant workers to economic growth and development is increasingly becoming critical not only for their own countries, but also as a catalyst for the upward socio-economic mobility in the region and internationally.

We believe that the COVID-19 crisis taught the world that coordinated and concerted efforts are needed to ensure that migrant health is addressed without discrimination throughout the migration cycle. A further consequence of Covid-19 has been the shrinking of the employment market, which could lead to a serious shortfall in the numbers of migrant workers who will leave for work this year and in turn a drop in worker remittances.

Madam President,

During the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic, while approximately 1.5 million migrant workers from Sri Lanka were overseas, the Government of Sri Lanka accorded high priority towards addressing their concerns, providing food and medicines where required, and where possible, working with host countries to obtain legitimization of their status and medical facilities including testing for Covid-19. In addition, with use of a web portal 'Contact Sri Lanka' created to guide and provide information and to assist in emergencies, over 13,000 questions posed by Overseas Sri Lankans (OSLs) were answered by a dedicated team, ensuring the wellbeing of the migrant workers spread over 120 countries. Through intra-governmental coordination utilizing a 'whole of Government' approach we have managed to overcome the challenges and manage the health, quarantine and travel logistics aspects.

Notwithstanding the challenges it entailed both in terms of the logistics of movement and on the capacities on quarantine to the GOSL, as of 06 July 2020, of 14,006 Sri Lankans evacuated on repatriation flights over a period of approximately 2 months, 5125 (36.59%) were migrant workers. As we speak, Sri Lanka has sent at least one repatriation flight to almost all the destinations which have a large migrant worker presence, with multiple flights to Male, Dubai, Qatar, Dhaka and Singapore. Sri Lanka is also in the process of expediting the return of a near 40,000 migrant workers who have lost their jobs.

Madam President,

It must be noted that Sri Lanka has long recognized that the health of migrant workers is vital in the future management of migrant populations. In 2013, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the International Organization on Migration (IOM), launched the 'National Migration Health Policy', through which the IOM conducts migration health assessments and gives technical assistance in developing standards for health assessments for inbound and outbound migrants. One of the priority areas identified under the key strategic area of inbound migration had been the strengthening of core capacities and quarantine activities at Sri Lankan ports of entry. Sri Lanka also organized the 2nd Global Consultation on Migrant Health in Colombo from 21-23 February in 2017, partnering with the IOM and the WHO, which provided a platform for multi-sectoral dialogue and political commitment to enhance the health of migrants, focused on three thematic areas within a rights-based, people-centered, gender and equity framework. Additionally, Sri Lanka has continued to stress the need to pay due attention to migrant health as Sri Lanka successively chaired the Colombo Process from 2013-2017, and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue from 2016-2018. This provided the opportunity to design crucial regional modalities that could play a greater role in the post-COVID scenario, for the benefit of the migrant workers, as well as the sending and receiving countries.

In retrospect, we believe that if the issue of 'migrant health', which Sri Lanka had championed received greater international attention at the time, there may have been a tangible difference in the management of the Covid-19 crisis, particularly with regard to undocumented workers, stranded in host countries, whose access to medical facilities remains limited.

Sri Lanka urges that greater regional and global efforts be channeled to ensure that 'migrant health' becomes a cornerstone in the future management of migrant populations, and the human right to health is secured for all, including migrants and refugees.

Thank you.