

Translation of the speech made by His Excellency the President Maithripala Sirisena at the High-level meeting of the Global Consultation on Migrant Health, Colombo, 23rd February 2017

Honorable Minister of Health, Nutrition & Indigenous Medicine Dr. Rajitha Senarathne , Regional Director of the IOM, Regional Director of the WHO, Secretary Health as well as representatives of all other countries, all invitees representing different organizations, dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be part of this Second International Conference on Migrants which is held in Sri Lanka, organized jointly by IOM and WHO.

Especially I convey my heartfelt thanks to the IOM, for deciding to co-host the second conference on Migrant Health in Sri Lanka after having the first conference in Spain 7 years back.

It is with a real sense of pleasure that we wind up this conference after 3 successful days, and I would like to thank everyone present for accepting our invitation to attend this conference as well as this Closing ceremony.

The Colombo Statement which is issued after the completion of 3 days will be very important internationally as well as nationally, among all the countries in the field of Migration and Health.

I can remember when I was the Health Minister visiting the headquarters of IOM in 2011 and discussing about our work at the headquarters with the Director General IOM. I'm even happier to join this important event along with them, 6 years later.

We are all aware that the UN Organization including and the WHO has given very high priority to the problems posed by migrants as well as by refugees.

Therefore I would like to mention as member states of the UN Organization and WHO, it is essential that we should all pay our attention and dedication to the work carried out by the IOM.

Migrants may arrive either legally or illegally. One who is coming legally is a blessing to the country and the illegal migrant is considered as a threat to the receiving country.

The UN, WHO and IOM are paying their attention to the Health of the migrant as it can affect the health of the people in the receiving country. Unhealthy migrant can cause a long term problem to the receiving country. As all of you aware our country is now free from Malaria, Polio and Filariasis. I believe that all of you acknowledge that Sri Lanka has achieved a high standard within our quality health services when compared with global health indicators. However migration will continue to pose a challenge to our health system.

I greatly admire the support and dedication shown by the regional director of IOM and her hardworking staff, to make this event a success.

As you are all aware, all migrants pose health risks on one end, as well as economic, social and political consequences on another end. My peaceful and beautiful country, is indeed a blessing to countless legal immigrants, but is no doubt like many other countries is facing the problems posed by illegal immigrants as well.

President's speech

Therefore it is important that the individual nations should have the determination and courage to make the necessary legal decisions to protect one's own national interests as well as to promote international relations.

I want to thank each and every one of you for spending these 3 days in this wonderful and peaceful country, in order to take part in this conference. On the other hand, I believe that, you were attentive of the fact that this conference was held in Sri Lanka probably because Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to implement a National Policy regarding Migration health. Therefore, I believe that this is a great honor to my beloved country, and is also an example for many other countries to follow.

I believe that, at the end of this conference, all of us as a group should be dedicated to seeing that the objectives stated in the Colombo statement regarding the collective health of the human race with regards to the health of migrants, and can be fulfilled dutifully.

I have to specifically state that, I will in my power do the needful, in bringing the attention towards the health of migrants and refugees, when I will represent my nation at the United Nations conference, which is held annually— where diverse topics will be discussed.

It has been a great pleasure to participate at this event. A few minutes into the conference, I felt that I was not the President of this nation, but instead the health minister of this nation— a post which I held previously. It rekindled a fond past memory.

Therefore, I am greatly pleased to participate in making this event successful, together with a group of educated, respected, intelligent and multitalented individuals such as you. Also, I would like to greatly admire the leadership shown by the incumbent minister of health, Dr. Rajitha Senaratne, and his hardworking staff together as a nation, who together provide completely free systems of service for both national health and migrant health, and also greatly admire his exceptional duty in representing my country in international affairs regarding the health sector.

Also, I would like to greatly admire the leadership, guidance and dedication shown by the Regional Director of IOM, and her staff, towards this cause. I would like to admire the courtesy, support and assistance shown by the Regional Director of the WHO, Dr. Poonam Singh—who is also a representative of our neighboring nation— and the work carried out by the WHO in this region under her guidance.

I greatly admire the participation and the support shown by each and every representative of each and every nation, diplomats, experts of the health sector, representatives of various organizations, to make this event a success. I would like to repeatedly wish good luck and extend my blessing towards all those who participated in making this event a success. I would like to finally thank each and every one of you for the dedication you have shown towards this field.

Thank you.