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Sri Lanka joins in measures to protect migrant workers at the Abu Dhabi Dialogue

A series of initiatives aimed at boosting protection and improving conditions of employment for millions of foreign workers in the Gulf have been agreed upon at the Third Ministerial Consultative Meeting of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) comprising Asian countries sending and receiving labour, which concluded in Kuwait last week. The 'Kuwait Declaration' noted that "recognizing that individual government's efforts may fall short, we resolve to work together to prevent and sanction exploitative recruitment practices that place workers at great risk and undermine fundamental rights".

Ministers and Heads of Delegations from Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam attended this meeting, held on 26-27 November 2014 under the chairmanship of Kuwait. Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva Ravinatha Aryasinha led the Sri Lanka delegation.

In a message to the meeting, Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare Dilan Perera called "for the introduction of a standard employment contract for domestic sector workers in GCC countries". He commended that "such a contract which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has agreed with Sri Lanka and the Philippines be adopted". He said "such a standard contract will result in a more contented work force, which will in turn, result in better performances by them". As the current Chair-in-Office of the Colombo Process (CP) - the grouping of Asian labour sending countries who are all members of the ADD and where the GCC countries are observers, Minister Perera said "the two regional consultative processes complement each other". He noted that since assuming the Chair of the CP one year ago, "Sri Lanka had been able to conduct two Senior Official's Meetings, the 3rd Asia-EU Dialogue on Labour Migration and in collaboration with UN Women developed a long overdue Standard Employment Contract for female domestic workers". The Minister added that "he hoped to receive all countries participating at the Ministerial Conference of the Colombo Process scheduled to be held in Colombo in the 4th quarter of 2015".

Addressing the Meeting, Ambassador Aryasinha said "Sri Lanka had embarked on 5 thematic areas for focus under Sri Lanka's leadership of the Colombo Process - review the Qualification Recognition Processes including transnational accreditation and monitoring, Promote Cheaper, Faster & Safer Transfer of Remittances, Ethical Labour Recruitment Practices, Effective Pre-departure Orientation & Empowerment, and Developing a database on the economic trends in the destination countries". He "emphasized the considerable scope for CP-ADD cooperation in these areas, particularly in evolving a 'qualification recognition process', where the support of the labour receiving countries was pivotal towards its operationalization". To this end, Ambassador Aryasinha "called upon the ADD to enable all CP countries interested in joining the on-going pilot project on 'Skill Development, Certification, Upgrading and Recognition' and to orient the study towards the goal of putting in place early an effective 'qualification recognition process' ". He said "this would not only bring greater predictability by ensuring that those recruited are of a better quality and will be better paid commensurate with their skill, but it would also reduce the tensions that sometimes occur between employer and employee".

Earlier at the Senior Officials Meeting which preceded the Ministerial consultation, Additional General Manager of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment K.O.D.D. Fernando and Coordinating Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare Dr. Roshan Hassim, made comprehensive presentations of the web based recruitment system, migration management system and the pre-departure orientation programme implemented in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's Chargé d'Affaires in Kuwait Mohamad Anas was also associated in the meetings, which was also attended by representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization on Migration (IOM), the World Bank and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC).

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