



**Statement by H.E. Ravinatha Aryasinha
Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to United Nations in
Geneva and
Chair of the Geneva-based Colombo Process Member States**

*Third Senior Officials' Meeting of the Colombo Process
Colombo, Sri Lanka, 04 November 2015*

Hon. Thalatha Athukorala, Minister of Foreign Employment and Chair in Office of the Colombo Process,

Mr. G.S. Withanage, Secretary of Minister of Foreign Employment,

Distinguished representatives from Capitals of the Colombo Process (CP) Member States, and Colleagues from Geneva based Permanent Missions of the CP Member States

Representatives from Swiss Development Cooperation, UAE and Nigeria,

Representatives of IOM and other International Organizations, and civil society organizations

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the third Senior Officials' Meeting of the Colombo Process, which is a regional grouping of 11 countries¹ in Asia, that have substantial numbers of their nationals working abroad, and managing contractual labour. There is an estimated overseas worker population of 45 million of Asian origin which is growing in numbers and diversity in terms of destination and source countries. Their contributions to the economies and development are increasingly becoming vital not only for their own countries but also as a catalyst for upward socio-economic mobility in the region and internationally as well. The Colombo Process seeks to provide Member States with an environment to engage in dialogue, exchange of views and cooperate on issues related to contractual labour migration for the mutual benefit of all its peoples.

¹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam

When Sri Lanka took over the chair of the Colombo Process from Bangladesh two years ago - to be precise, on 21 October 2013 at the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka in Geneva, the conventional wisdom was that Colombo Process countries in most instances being competitors, many of the issues we have to grapple with within the Colombo Process were beyond the capacity of the group, and that we would be wasting our time trying to do so. However, while having no illusion of the challenges that persist, we dismissed the notion that must necessarily be a zero-sum-game, and proceeded on the basis of 3 important principles.

First, Sri Lanka took the view that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and that a collective voice will be stronger than any individual voice, and in consultation with the membership of the Colombo Process evolved a 'road map' on collective actions to be undertaken in the course of her chairmanship, where member countries can optimize their mutual benefit. Second, Sri Lanka was of the view that if we were to make a difference and ensure that some real benefits would accrue to the people of member countries, it was important that we seek to address the tough issues. Third, in order to benefit from the relative strengths and/or interest of member countries, it was decided to entrust the leadership of the different areas of action to member states that volunteered to do so.

Sri Lanka's 'road map' for its period of Chairmanship sought to strengthen engagement between CP countries and countries of destination under the theme "International Labour Migration for Prosperity: Adding Value by Working Together". Accordingly, our primary focus identified five main areas for cooperation;

- i. Develop a Qualification Recognition Processes including transnational accreditation and monitoring**
- ii. Ethical Labour Recruitment Practices (including promoting Standard Employment Contracts)**
- iii. Effective Pre-departure Orientation & Empowerment, with a additional focus on migration and health.**
- iv. Promote Cheaper, Faster & Safer Transfer of Remittances**
- v. Enhancing capacities of the Colombo Process participating countries to track labour market trends, to which was later added the setting up of the Colombo Process Migration Resource Centre (CPMRC) in support of CP goals.**

The leadership for each of these five areas was taken by Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, India and Pakistan, respectively.

The 1st Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) held from 6-7 May 2014 in Colombo endorsed all 5 thematic areas and focused on thematic areas III & IV (pre-departure orientation and remittances), while the 2nd SOM held on 14 October had a special focus on Thematic Area II (ethical recruitment). In the two year period of Sri Lanka's leadership, the Geneva based Colombo Process countries which serve as the year round collaborators in moving ahead this project with the support of the

International Organization on Migration (IOM), have continued to meet regularly at PR level and at Expert level. For the first time in the history of the Colombo Process, we are particularly glad to have been able to include one diplomat from each of the Geneva based CP member countries in the Senior Officials Meeting.

Two years on, at a time 'migrants' are largely associated as conveyors of despair and a threat in many parts of the world, we have been able ensure that they continue to remain beacons of hope and opportunity. Contrary to the conventional wisdom in leading the CP, Sri Lanka has received in full measure the support of the entire membership of the Colombo Process in the quest of betterment of our migrant work force spread across the world, and being competitors for the same markets or other national interests has not stood in our way. Sustaining this, and translating this collective will and voice of the CP in to concrete and tangible actions that leads to a future where the rights and wellbeing of our migrant workers and their families are secured even more, remains our challenge.

In that context, I am glad to note that today we have several tangibles in these 5 areas to report on to this SOM on the progress already made, as well as proposals that will be further discussed with a view to work towards tangible goals, during the 5 focussed sessions on the respective thematic areas during the course of today. I wish to acknowledge the support provided in this context by the IOM and its partners supporting the work of the CP, particularly the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

On the **Skills and qualification recognition** process, pursuant to discussions held during the Kuwait Ministerial meeting of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) on 27 November 2014, firm linkages have been established in this area between the CP and the ADD, through an ADD-supported initiative on skills development, certification and recognition which is supported by the UAE and Kuwait, involving contractual labour workers from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A project proposal has been developed to conduct a pilot project in Sri Lanka, to take forward the harmonization of the occupational certification of construction workers going to the UAE and Kuwait. With financial support from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), agencies such as ILO which has expertise in this area through its country office in Sri Lanka, is supporting this project, and we look forward to hear the progress they have made.

With regard to **Ethical Labour Recruitment Practices**, during the second SOM, the outcome of a research study conducted on the '**recruitment industry**' by IOM was presented and this research documented the specific problems to be addressed including high recruitment fees, deceit about the terms and conditions of employment and processing of fake documents that leave migrants unprotected. As part of the CP thematic outputs, a proposal to map existing recruitment monitoring practices and complaint mechanisms in CP countries and selected destination countries has been envisaged **to address the issue of unethical recruitment**. Consultations have already started with the Asian Association of Overseas Employment Service Providers (OESP-AAA) to prepare for a regional meeting in

Bangladesh in March or April 2016 which the CP will support. OESP-AAA are here at the SOM and we will hear from them on how the CP will also support national level meetings with national associations of the OESP-AAA. Further, there are linkages with the ADD, which is supporting a UAE-funded recruitment **research project examining specific ADD recruitment corridors**. IOM's office in Kuwait is managing this research, and has enlisted partners in both India and the UAE to define the research methodology which is in its initial stage. We will hear an update with regard to this project during the course of our detailed discussions.

Recognizing that Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO) and Post-Arrival Orientation (PAO) can reduce the vulnerability of migrant workers and contribute to better social and workplace integration by heightening their awareness of their rights and obligations in countries of destination, an initiative put forwarded by the Philippines, namely the Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme for Migrant Workers (CIOP), to the ADD Ministerial Conference in 27 November 2014 received strong endorsement. Under the CP, a proposal was developed to support the development of the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars (PDOS). The first part of this work, financially supported by SDC, was the mapping of existing national pre-departure programmes in selected CP countries. This mapping was conducted by the Scalabrini Migration Centre in Manila, Philippines, and they will present the key findings here at the SOM. We also look forward to focusing on the possible ways to incorporate health aspects in relation to migrants as a CP priority, an area in which Sri Lanka has shown much innovation, as acknowledged by the IOM.

Transfer costs of remittances can vary considerably across the various corridors between different CP countries and destination countries. As you are aware this issue gets added significance following the adoption of the 2013 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by world leaders at the 70 UNGA in New York last month, which calls for the reduction of transaction costs of migrant remittances to less than 3% and the elimination of remittance corridors with costs higher than 5% by 2030. Under the CP, we have already made a head start in this direction, having identified it as a priority more than 2 years ago in our 'road map', and in seeking to collate accurate remittance data which is transparent as well as actionable, and can be used by migrants to compare transfer prices accurately. IOM has started working with partners on methodologies to obtain this data in specific CP corridors, with the objective of ensuring that migrants have access to the data. Following on their inputs to the 1st SOM, the ILO and the World Bank are additionally engaged in processes which could help ensure that the hard earned money of migrants are better channeled and invested, on which we will be hearing more during this meeting.

It was decided at the outset that developing the capacity of CP countries to capture and analyze labour market trends in the destination countries was important to ensure which sectors are in demand, to help in planning, designing and implementing its labour migration policies. It is only a few months ago that the CP was able to focus on this area, and through funding provided by the SDC we have already embarked on a project to support the production of a '**labour market research operational guide**' that will facilitate the documentation of these labour

market trends, which it intends to produce in 2016. **Establishment of the CP Migration Resource Centre** to develop as a resource portal to contain information and best practices in support of all the thematic areas is another tangible result achieved under this thematic area. With the financial assistance of SDC, a technical expert has been appointed and is already based here in Colombo. We look forward to hearing her perspectives on the tasks ahead during the course of this meeting.

Further, Sri Lanka with IOM assistance has developed **detailed action plans** containing the objectives, envisaged tangible actions, and timelines for expected outcomes on each of these 5 thematic areas by mid-2016, when the CP Ministerial Meeting is to be held in Colombo.

Recently, at the Fifth Global Meeting of Chairs and Secretaries of Regional Consultative Processes on Migration (RCPs) held in Cairo, Egypt on 21-22 October 2015 which was attended by participants from 18 Regional Migration Processes as well as 14 civil society organizations, Secretary/Foreign Employment had the

opportunity to detail the activities undertaken under Sri Lanka's Chairmanship of the CP, and those among us who attended this session, bear witness to the considerable enthusiasm shown by the participants of this meeting, for what several described as as CP's ability to move beyond declarations, to "tangible action" taken for migrants from the Asian region by the CP that could be emulated by others.

In addition to these 5 primary areas of focus, under Sri Lanka's chairmanship attention has been also paid to build relationships between the CP and relevant regional and international process that were of relevance to migration, as well as to contribute towards those processes.

Prominent among this has been the **CPs cooperation within the Abu-Dhabi Dialogue (ADD)** in order to enhance cooperation with destination countries in the Gulf region. As already noted, tangible benefits have accrued to the membership of the CP through assistance received by the CP membership through two ADD initiatives that were discussed at the ADD Ministerial Meeting in November 2014. The first project is a pilot project related to skills development, certification, upgrading and recognition that involves UAE, Kuwait, Philippines, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The other pilot project is the Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme for Migrant Workers (CIOP), which will develop best practice modules related to pre-departure and post-arrival orientation.

Also in order to enhance the **CP's cooperation with the EU**, the third Asia-EU Dialogue was held in Colombo following the 2nd SOM from 15-16 October 2014. The two day meeting focused on discussions on access to EU markets in semi-skilled and skilled categories; labour market assessments in Europe; policy aspects and regulation of labour migration to Europe; enhancing the employability of Asian skilled labour and professionals in the EU market; practical tools to promote labour migration between Asia and EU; and good practices in Asia-EU Labour Migration. It has been proposed that the next Asia-EU Dialogue be held in Spring 2016, prior to

the CP Ministerial Meeting in Colombo. Clearly more needs to be done in this area, and as decided at the last CP PRs meeting in Geneva, in early October at a meeting with the EU Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, I emphasized the CP's serious commitment to do so. Given the EU's current migration focus in the European region itself, as a first step, we are seeking to organize an interaction in Geneva between a relevant official from Brussels and the CP Experts group, to map out what tangible steps can be taken between the two groups of countries.

The CP is also working towards **enhancing cooperation between the CP and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)**, which is a government-led process to advance understanding and cooperation on the mutually reinforcing relationship between migration and development and to foster practical and action-oriented outcomes. We are happy to note that Bangladesh, a CP Member State, assumed the Chair of the GFMD on 16 October 2015 and I hope this will pave way for CP to have even greater linkages with the GFMD. We will hear more from Bangladesh about their strategic vision for GFMD and its cooperation with CP.

Migration also has strong links to the **outcome document of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which the CP has been closely tracking. Paragraph 29 of the outcome document notes that “we will cooperate internationally to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration involving full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants regardless of migration status, of refugees and of displaced persons”. Out of 169 targets indicated in the outcome document of the SDGs, there are 7 targets that explicitly refer to migrants and migration. The CP must continue to remain engaged in the implementation and reviewing of these migration related targets in the SDGs, and how we do so must be seriously deliberated during this meeting.

Given the difficulties encountered in funding for the activities of the CP at the time Sri Lanka assumed the Chair, over the past 18 months our Experts in Geneva have also devoted considerable **effort to develop a self-funding mechanism** based on modest contributions from the membership and also drawing on similar and replicable experiences of the various other RCPs. This will not only ensure predictability and regularity of CP meetings, but also encourage countries to accept the leadership of the CP, thus ensuring the smooth rotation of the CP Chair. I hope we would be able to arrive at a consensus on implementing a self-funding mechanism during this SOM, which could be operationalized following the Ministerial meeting to be held next year.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I believe that during this two days Senior Officials' Meeting, we would be able to discuss and find possible ways of achieving the expected outcomes as envisaged under the Sri Lankan Chairmanship, with a view to providing a better life for all migrants workers from our region.

I thank you.