



**Statement by H.E. Ravinatha Aryasinha
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Geneva and
Chair of the Geneva-based Colombo Process Member States**

***Fourth Senior Officials' Meeting of the Colombo
Process Colombo, Sri Lanka, 24 August 2016***

Mr. G.S. Withanage, Secretary of the Ministry 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 Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the Representatives of IOM and other International Organizations, and civil society Organizations and Observers of the CP,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the fourth Senior Officials' Meeting of the Colombo Process. The CP is a regional grouping of 11 countries in Asia¹, to help manage the contractual labour migration from these countries, as they all have substantial numbers of their nationals working abroad. Currently, there is an estimated 45 million of Asian origin overseas worker population and it is growing in numbers and diversity in terms of destination and source countries. Their contributions to the economic growth and development are increasingly becoming critical not only for their own countries, but also has been a catalyst for the upward socio-economic mobility in the region and internationally as well. The Colombo Process therefore seeks to provide its Member States with a platform to facilitate dialogue, exchange of views and cooperate on issues related to contractual labour migration for the mutual benefit of all its peoples.

Since its inception in Colombo in 2001, the Colombo Process has come home with this Fifth Ministerial Officials' Meeting and I must sincerely acknowledge the considerable efforts and contributions made to this process by all the respective previous Chairs, namely the Philippines (2004), Indonesia (2005) and Bangladesh (2011). 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.

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

Mr. Chairman,

The conventional wisdom was that, the Colombo Process countries, in most instances being competitors, many of the issues that we have to grapple with were considered as beyond the capacity of leveraging as a Group. We were also largely dependent on external funds to even to organize the regular meetings. However, while having no illusion of the challenges that persist, we dismissed the notion that it must necessarily be a zero-sum-game, and proceeded on the basis of 4 important principles.

First, Sri Lanka took the view that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and that a collective voice would be stronger than any individual voice, and in consultation with the membership of the Colombo Process evolved a 'road map' on common actions to be undertaken in the course of her chairmanship, where member countries could 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 the tough issues be addressed. 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 those Member States that volunteered to do so. Fourth, the Colombo Process countries should generate from within sufficient funds to ensure regularity and predictability in their meetings.

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 an additional focus on migration and health.**
- iv. Promote Cheaper, Faster & Safer Transfer of Remittances**
- v. Enhance capacities of the Colombo Process participating countries to track labour market trends, to which was later added the setting up of the Colombo Process Technical Support Unit (CPTSU) in support of CP goals.**

The leadership for each of these five areas was taken by Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Thailand 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 2014 had a special focus on Thematic Area II (ethical recruitment). At the 3rd SOM that took place on 4-5 November 2015 in Colombo, the Member States endorsed the setting up of Thematic Area Working Groups (TAWG) for the 5 key areas in the road map; in addition they agreed on a self-funding mechanism, thus contributing to the long-term sustainability

of the Process; finally they agreed on the establishment and Terms of Reference of the CP Technical Support Unit (CP TSU) in Colombo. In the two-year period of Sri Lanka's leadership, the **Geneva based Colombo Process** Member States have continued to meet regularly at the Permanent Representative level and at Expert level, led by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka in Geneva, thus serving as the year round collaborators in moving this project forward, with the technical and secretarial support of the International Organization on Migration (IOM). Notably, the representatives from Geneva, were also able to attend the 3rd SOM in Colombo, and helped in defining future targets in support of the roadmap, the fruits of which you will witness today.

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 to ensure that they continue to remain beacons of hope and opportunity. Notwithstanding the difficulty of addressing certain issues, Sri Lanka as the Chair has benefited from the full support of the entire membership of the Colombo Process in the quest for improving the conditions of its migrant work force across the world, irrespective of the various national interests. Sustaining this, and translating CP collective will and voice into concrete and tangible actions leading to a future where the rights and the wellbeing of our migrant workers and their families are secured even more, does remain our common challenge.

In that context, I am glad to note that today we can report on several tangible achievements and progress in these 5 areas to this SOM, as well as outline proposals for further discussion with a view to continuing working towards concrete results. I wish to acknowledge the support provided in this context by the IOM and its partners contributing to the work of the CP, notably the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

A short period of time has passed since the last SOM in November 2015, yet as agreed at that meeting, we have started to put in place several mechanisms to bring together relevant CP experts from the capitals in Thematic Area Working Groups. The first meetings of the TAWGs respectively on *Skills and Qualification Recognition* (Sri Lanka - Chair, Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan) and *Promoting Ethical Recruitment* (Bangladesh -Chair, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam) were convened on 31st May 2016 in Colombo. The first meeting of the TAWG on *Pre-departure Orientation (PDO) and Empowerment* (Philippines- Chair, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam) was held on 4th August 2016 in Bangkok. The *Labour Market Analysis* TAWG (Thailand- Chair, Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines) and the TAWG on *Remittances* (Pakistan- Chair, Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam) convened their first meetings on 21 July 2016 in Bangkok. I am pleased to report that the CP countries actively engaged in particular areas of focus, thus enabling all the five TAWGs to have substantive discussions and set themselves goals and key tasks. We look forward to receiving reports from the respective TAWG Chairs on the discussions and agreed actions/outcomes from their First Meetings.

Better **recognition of qualifications and skills** is crucial to ensuring that our CP nationals do not have to accept jobs that are below their skill levels, thus paving the way for better employment terms and conditions. One of the big challenges has been

ensuring that there is harmonization of all the certification systems in countries of destination and CP countries, in the myriad of sectors that migrant workers obtain employment in. We have made small but concrete steps by supporting the pilot initiative of the ADD which focuses on skills certification in the construction, catering and electrical sectors in the UAE, Kuwait and certain CP countries, namely India, Pakistan, Philippines and Nepal. We have extended the scope of this pilot by bringing in the ILO to enhance the recognition of skills of Sri Lankan construction workers. The first tangibles have been the completion of a national assessment of labour market trends and skills profiles of a selection of migrant construction workers going to the GCC; and a detailed mapping of all the different skills assessment and certification standards between country of origin and destination. Important recommendations have come out from these mappings on how CP workers can be trained for more niche markets in the GCC and gain a competitive edge over workforces from Non-CP origin countries. Once migrant workers have this higher value attached to them, it translates into better wages, contractual terms and living conditions.

The commitment made on **fair and ethical recruitment** by Member States under our Chairmanship is a significant one, and signals the prominence that the CP has attached to global priorities to lower the costs of recruitment of migrants laid down by the UN Secretary General and the priorities of the Third Financing for Development Conference (the Addis Ababa Action Agenda), and also the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The adoption of this thematic priority also shows that the CP is prepared to take concrete steps towards implementing that commitment. At the last SOM we set some key deliverables, one of which was to promote culture change in the private sector, by supporting the Alliance of Asian Associations of Overseas Employment Service Providers (OESPAAA) - a network of lead recruitment industry representatives from each CP country, in holding their Fourth Regional Conference in March this year. The conference gave the recruitment industry an opportunity to discuss and agree on the promotion of ethical recruitment as a common objective through enhanced partnership with the Colombo Process. Another commitment made at the last SOM was to hold a series of symposiums for CP Member States and countries of destination to discuss ways to promote regulatory harmonization in this field, and the first of these took place yesterday. Another two will be held, and the outcomes will include a report setting out detailed recommendations.

The work of the CP in this area cannot be understated; it ensures more protection from unscrupulous employers, less exposure to labour exploitation and trafficking, and the abolition of practices such as extortionate fees and confiscation of passports. There is a global impetus to reduce recruitment costs, and the CP is an important vehicle for this. The ADD has also prioritised ethical recruitment, and with the support of SDC, the CP is supporting a research project on recruitment between India, Nepal and the UAE. The work of the CP has to continue to support this and other initiatives such as those of the UN Global Compact, ILO's Fair Recruitment Initiative, and IOM's IRIS, since our CP nationals stand most to benefit from the increased protection these initiatives bring.

Effective **Pre-departure Orientation & Empowerment** already forms an important component of the labour migration policies of many CP states in promoting the welfare

of their migrant worker nationals abroad. At the last SOM, CPMS reiterated their support for the Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme for Migrant Workers (CIOP), which is led by the Government of Philippines and which has been endorsed by the ADD. As we know, the CIOP proposes the development of training manuals and Regional Module Guides at a number of distinct stages, namely at the pre-employment stage, prior to departure, post-arrival, and at the return and reintegration stage. We received a report at the last SOM on the important mapping that was conducted of all the various CP nationally led PDO programmes. Since then I am pleased to say that with the support of the CP Technical Support Unit and IOM colleagues in Manila, a Regional Guide for the pre-departure modules and Programme Management System has been drafted and was presented to the ADD SOM in May 2016. Up to seven module guides have been developed, ranging from Remedies in Cases of Distress and Crises Situations; right through to Health Management while Working Abroad. I understand that the plan of the CP Technical Support Unit now is to roll out a regional Training of Trainers in a selection of CP Member States. An important next stage in development of the CIOP will be for both ADD destination and origin countries to put in motion a plan for complementing the PDO guides with post arrival orientation.

Regarding **transfer costs of remittances**, during the 3rd SOM, Member States reiterated their continued support for global efforts to reduce remittance transfer costs to 3% or less as stipulated in the 2013 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as agreed to augment national-level efforts to empower migrant workers and their families on remittance management and utilization. When the Thematic Area Working Group met recently under the chair of Pakistan, it provided a platform for CP Member States to discuss a set of priorities including the improvement of domestic remittance regulatory frameworks, promoting greater choice and availability of regulated money transfer operators (MTOs), more transparent information provision on remittance transfer costs, and the provision of more initiatives that promote financial education to migrant workers and their families through PDO and other suitable avenues.

The fifth thematic area concerns **enhancing capacities of the Colombo Process participating countries to track labour market trends**. The ability of CP Member States to analyse which sectors are in demand can assist in determining what type of skills training should be prioritised and relates closely to the other thematic areas, not just skills recognition but also pre-departure orientation and ethical recruitment. The Technical Support Unit organised a Regional Workshop on Labour Market Research on 1 June 2016 that heard contributions from experts from China, Malaysia, IOM's Kuwait office as well as other CP states. It was agreed that the production of a Labour Market Research Operational Guide should be the next step and would constitute an important tool for CP Member States. We are on the right track, but a lot of work needs to be done in this area. Echoing one of the recommendations of the Regional Workshop, I urge CP Member States to share vital information on labour market trends via the new online repository that has been developed on the CP website. The newly designed website provides an excellent platform for colleagues to share this information through a restricted access portal. I also urge the CP Technical Support Unit to start populating this website with all the data to hand on labour market gaps in major destination areas such as the EU.

This takes me on to the **establishment of the Colombo Process Technical Support Unit (CP TSU)**. As you would recall, the Terms of Reference for the CP TSU were discussed and agreed at the 3rd SOM and I am pleased to say that the CP TSU has become operational since January 2016, and since then, the Technical Expert and her team has been closely working with the CP Chair in Colombo to implement all the deliverables that I have talked about. I commend the hard work of Ms. Masako and her team here in Colombo, and she will be given the opportunity later today to present the work of already conducted and envisaged to carry out by the Unit, in particular the online repository, which has been developed and integrated into the Colombo Process website. This online repository will be a useful information tool with an exclusively for all Member States portal and for public use disseminating information regarding the work of the CP. With this the CP website has gone through a total revamp and a facelift has been given, with added new features and improved user-friendly functionality.

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 and attended by representatives from 18 Regional Migration Processes as well as 14 civil society organizations, the SL Secretary/Foreign Employment had the opportunity to detail the activities undertaken under Sri Lanka's Chairmanship of the CP; those among us who attended this session bear witness to the considerable enthusiasm shown by the participants to this meeting, for what was described as CP's ability to move beyond mere declarations to "tangible action" on behalf of migrants from the Asian region. On this the CP should be emulated by others.

In addition to these 5 primary areas of focus under Sri Lanka's chairmanship, efforts have also been made to enhance cooperation between the CP and other relevant regional and international processes related to migration, as well as to contribute constructively towards those processes.

Other Areas of Cooperation

Prominent among these has been the **CPs cooperation within the Abu-Dhabi Dialogue (ADD)**, a forum for both labour migrant receiving and sending countries to enhance mutual cooperation. Sri Lanka is pleased to be invited to assume Chairmanship of the ADD from January 2017, and we look forward to contributing to move forward the ADD agenda for the mutual benefit of both the labour sending and receiving countries. I have already mentioned three important initiatives that we are cooperating on, namely the Comprehensive Information Orientation Programme, the ADD Skills Development pilot project, and the recruitment research in specific corridors. These priorities of the ADD closely reflect those of the CP and I would respectfully recommend that we continue to support these initiatives and to look for further cooperation on other areas of mutual interest at this meeting.

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. At the 3rd SOM, the CP Members revisited the need to enhance cooperation with the EU, not only through an Asia-EU Dialogue, but through exploring options to expanding the EU market for migrant workers from the CP countries. The EU's current migration focus is extensively aimed at handling the flows into the European region itself, yet we continue to express our intention to interact with relevant EU official from Brussels and the CP Experts group first, possibly in Geneva, to map out what concrete steps can be taken between the two groups of countries.

The CP is also working towards **enhancing cooperation with the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)**, 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. With Bangladesh, a CP Member State, having assumed the Chair of the GFMD on 16 October 2015, the CP can have even greater linkages with the GFMD. We will hear more from Bangladesh about the developments of the GFMD and how the CP could contribute to the next summit in December.

The CP is one of the first RCPs to have put the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on its agenda and to have formulated recommendations at the 3rd SOM to make progress on some of the migration-related targets, particularly regarding decent work and safe migration (SDG targets 8.8. and 10.7). The CP must continue to remain engaged on these aspects, in particular when each country is in the implementation and reviewing of these migration related targets in the SDGs. The CP can be an informal platform to review regional progress made in implementing the abovementioned SDG targets and by sharing experiences and challenges in working on the globally agreed indicators at the national level.

Mr. Chairman,

As we started to embark on ambitious thematic plan, it also required us to make certain changes to the organizational and administrative aspects of the Colombo Process. Given the difficulties encountered in resourcing the regular activities of the CP, over the past two and a half years, our Experts in Geneva devoted considerable time and **efforts over the past two and a half years 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. I am pleased to announce that as a result of our collective endeavours, we were able to agree at the 3rd SOM on a formula for the self-funding of the CP activities. Once the CP Ministers endorse the self-funding mechanism which is expected to be operationalized by early next year, it will not only ensure predictability and regularity of CP meetings and the independence of the CP Agenda, but will also encourage countries to accept the leadership of the CP more readily, thus ensuring the smooth rotation of the CP Chair.

With all these achievements, we will also be adopting the '**amended Operating**

Modalities of the CP', at the current Ministerial Meeting. These amendments will further clarify institutional matters for this voluntary forum in future.

With our gradual yet firm progress as an RCP, we also have **attracted substantial interest from potential donors**. I take this opportunity to express our appreciation for their financial support, in particular to the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), in facilitating the work on the thematic areas and the CP TSU.

In recognition of the prevailing collaborative spirit, we also have started to **grow in numbers**; we will be formally welcoming Cambodia as a new and the twelfth-member to our CP family, and we hope more will follow!

Mr. Chairman,

As I mentioned earlier, complementing the SOMs and Ministerial Meetings, the regular meeting of the Permanent Representatives (6 PR level Meetings) and 12 experts level meetings, have been held during Sri Lanka's Chairmanship, taking advantage of all the CP Member States' presence in Geneva and of the presence of the International Partnership Division (IPD) and the Labour Mobility and Human Development Division (LHD) at the IOM Headquarters in Geneva has proven a cost-effective and practical way in contributing to sustain the momentum. So, I also wish to congratulate all my Geneva-based colleagues and their experts, the IPD and the LHD, (I note the presence of some of them here today), while there are many others both currently working on this project and supported it previously for their collective spirit in helping me and the Sri Lanka Mission to execute the mandate given to us by the CP Ministers and the SOMs.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I believe that during this two-day Meeting of the Senior Officials and the Ministers, we would be able to discuss and find possible ways of achieving the expected outcomes as envisaged in the proposed 'Colombo Process Ministerial Declaration', with a view to providing a better, safe, and dignified life for all migrant workers from our countries, who provide an essential boost to most of our economies.

I thank you.