

## **Speech of Hon. Thalatha Atukorale, Minister of Foreign Employment, Sri Lanka**

Hon Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Excellency William Lacy Swing, Director General of International  
Organisation for Migration,

Honourable Ministers of the Colombo Process Member Countries,

All distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Wish you a pleasant morning and I warmly welcome you all.

Sri Lanka is honoured to host the 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Consultation on  
Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin  
in Asia under the Colombo Process as the chair and address you .

Though His Excellency Maitripala Sirisena, the President of Democratic  
Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is unable to present at this moment as  
scheduled , due to an urgent official engagement , I would like to  
present greetings and best wishes sent by the President of Sri Lanka for  
this remarkable event .

First of all I welcome the person who deserves significant recognition,  
Excellency William Lacy Swing, the Director General of the  
International Organisation for Migration. He has been invaluable to Sri  
Lankan's chairmanship and he has proven his strong commitment  
towards the progress of the Colombo Process since assuming his duty as  
the DG-IOM.

I would also like to extend my welcome to my Senior Colleague, Honourable Mangala Samaraweera the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Sri Lanka, who equally deserves to be commended for driving the process through well- balanced regional and global relations with all our partners and with the encouragement and guidance extended to me to host this 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Consultation under the Sri Lankan Chairmanship.

I welcome all Honourable ministers of the Colombo Process member states ,Vice Ministers,and their senior officials who took the time to come to Sri Lanka. As the chair of Colombo Process, we had invaluable support from you all throughout Sri Lanka's chairing period and with your contributions today, I'm confident that this meeting would be a tremendous success.

I welcome all the Ambassadors, Foreign Dignitaries, Secretaries to the Ministries ,Government Officials, representatives of International and National Organizations, civil society, private sector and media to this inauguration ceremony with my sincere gratitude to all.

We live in an era of unprecedented human mobility in which more than 244 million international migrants worldwide are searching for economic opportunity, peace and security.

The new UN data on "Trends in International Migrant" shows that the number of international migrants has grown at a rate faster than the world's population. As a result, the share of migrants in the global population reached 3.3 per cent in 2015, up from 2.8 per cent in 2000.

Nearly half of all international migrants worldwide were born in Asia. Between 2000 and 2015, Asia added more international migrants than any other major region for a total of 26 million additional migrants.

Labour migration from the 11 members of Colombo Process countries has grown rapidly since 2005, and out of the top 10 emigration countries worldwide, five are Colombo Process members namely India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines.

Hence, migration today is a multi-dimensional process with potential benefits and challenges to the labour sending and receiving countries. Receiving countries get productive workers who fill key gaps in the labour market and help their demographic profiles.

Sending countries like us receive billions of dollars in remittances from our overseas workers, attract investment from affluent members of our diaspora and leverage the benefits of circular migration when returning migrants bring back their skills, expertise, contacts and personal wealth.

As we all know, on Sept 25<sup>th</sup> 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**) and 169 accompanying targets as part of a global agenda to promote Sustainable development over the next 15 years. This programme includes a historic step towards incorporating migration into mainstream global development policy. Target 8 and 10.7 of the **SDGs** include migration most prominently, motivating countries **to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.**

So, **SDGs** clearly communicate migration potential to serve as an effective engine for development. Therefore, a well governed migration process which can bring profound benefits to both receiving and sending countries is more urgent than ever.

As member states of the Colombo Process, we all are faced with the complex responsibility of ensuring the benefits of the labour migration systems apply to our labour migrants and their families while contributing to long-term economic growth and development in both

sending and receiving countries. As the member states of the CP, we all have to seek innovative ways for the welfare of our citizens. So, it is important for us to play a more active role to develop coherent, multidimensional and strategic approach for migration management.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** you will recall that the overall theme for Sri Lanka Chairmanship is "**International Labour Migration for Prosperity: Adding Value by Working Together**"– We firmly believe that active, well-crafted and coherent migration policies and programmes hold the key to reach for that prosperity

By exchanging experiences, practices and lessons learnt, we can craft policies and programmes that fully realize the potential of mobility. This is the essence of the Colombo Process.

Since assuming the position of Chair-in-Office of the CP in October 2013, Sri Lanka has prepared a Road Map that sought to strengthen engagement between both sending and receiving countries, under five thematic areas of focus.

1. Review the Qualification and Skill Recognition Processes including transnational accreditation and monitoring.
2. Promote Cheaper, Faster & Safer Transfer of Remittance.
3. Ethical Labour Recruitment Practices.
4. Effective Pre-Departure Orientation & Empowerment.
5. Enhancing the capacities of CP member States to trace labour market trends and support CP Goals.

Accordingly, a detailed action plans has been developed containing the objectives, envisaged tangible actions, and timelines for expected outcomes on each of these five thematic areas, with the intention of operationalizing these action points after obtaining approval of the Ministerial Meeting.

Members of all Five Thematic Area Working Groups (TAWG) have met in Colombo and in Bangkok during the months of May to August and will submit the progress with key tasks, time lines and indicators to fulfil the expected outcome for the benefit of member countries.

Efforts have been made during our Chair to ensure that tangible benefits accrue to the membership of Colombo Process, through Cooperation within the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) in order to enhance cooperation with destination countries in the Gulf region and the EU with a view to secure greater labour market access.

We have also made considerable effort to develop a self-funding mechanism in consultation with all member states which will ensure predictability and regularity of the Colombo Process activities and meetings and I hope that during this Ministerial meeting we will be able to adopt this revised operating modalities including the proposed self-funding mechanism for the Colombo Process.

During the chairing period we have successfully hosted four (4) senior official meetings to date.

As CP member countries we need to continue our efforts with collaborative action. I believe that productive, safe and harmonious migration can only be achieved if there is wider and deeper inter-state co-operation among the sending and receiving countries. It is the key to a better functioning International Labour Migration Process. It will provide us with more positive results through a voluntary and co-operative effort based on shared recognition of the benefits.

In this way, the Colombo Process would continue to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible labour migration as stated in the SDGs for the benefit of sending and receiving countries, as well as the migrant workers and their families.

Hence, I hope that we all will be able to materialize our desired goals under the theme of **“International Labour Migration for Prosperity: Adding Value by Working Together”**

All of us have the same responsibility to turn the disadvantages of migration into advantages. I hope this forum will give a real imprint in the shape of actions to maximize the positive conditions and effects of migration.

Excellency, Ambassador William Lacy swing thank you for gracing this inaugural event of the Ministerial Consultation and for the technical, financial and secretarial assistance provided in organising the CP events through your able team in Colombo Office and the regional Office. I hope that the IOM Support will be essential in moving forward the important recommendations that had initiated from the meetings.

Thank you, Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Minister of Foreign Employment for your presence which encourages me to fulfil my task as the Chair of the CP.

In closing, let me convey my gratitude to all Hon Ministers, representatives of the CP member countries, destination countries, observers, international and national organisations, civil society for their presence to make our efforts a success.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the member of the Media here today and I urge them to send a clear and ambitious message on the importance of a regional level collaboration of the Asian Labour Sending Countries and the progressive steps taken by the Colombo Process for making a better future for our migrant workers.

Thank you and welcome to the 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Consultation of the Colombo Process.