



**Statement by Sri Lanka
at the 105th Council of the International Organization for Migration
25 - 28 November 2014, Geneva**

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset let me congratulate Ambassador Sammie Eddico of Ghana on his election as the Chairperson for the 105th Council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and for his leadership in steering our discussions. We thank Ambassador William Lacy Swing the Director General of the IOM for his comprehensive report and appreciate the work of IOM for more than six decades in partnering for humanitarian and protection needs of migrants around the world.

Given the decline in working population and increasing ageing population in many industrialized economies, combined with continued need for skilled and semi-skilled workers in other parts of the world, there has been opportunities and potential created for Asian labour sending States to have their workers migrating out of their countries. Over the past years this trend has increased and as noted by the report of the DG of IOM, this process has led to enhance the diversity of countries; hence we believe that this new tendency should be managed in a manner that it will be a win-win situation for both labour sending and receiving countries.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka places migration high in its national development policy, and has adopted a human rights based approach towards migrant workers, and considered them primarily as human beings and secondarily as income generators. An estimated 1.8 million Sri Lankans currently reside and work abroad which is equal to 25% of the country's total employable population and approximately 8% of the entire population. These migrant workers, whether they are highly skilled professionals or semi-skilled workers, make a significant contribution both to their own country as well as to the host countries. Though the number of annual departures on foreign employment is relatively small, Sri Lanka earns 8.5 % of its GDP from remittances, which amounts to 35% of the country's foreign exchange, thus making a significant impact on Sri Lanka's development and the successful achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka has developed a comprehensive labour migration policy, with a view to managing labour migration properly and orderly and to ensure dignity, security and equity for Sri Lankan nationals seeking employment abroad. The Government has taken concerted efforts in several policy key areas, namely, improving recruitment practices and educating labour agents, pre-departure orientation, empowerment of those migrants who have re-entered the country, facilitating cheaper, faster, and safer transfer of remittances.

In realizing these broad policy areas, the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, has launched a number of programmes and projects such as, insurance schemes; scholarships for children of migrant workers; repatriation; medical facilities; financial assistance for migrant workers, distressed migrant workers and their family members; *Ratawiruvo Programme* and *Rataviru Rekawarana Sewa Programme.*, upgrade the quality and professional skills of employees by providing pre-departure training and reskilling, and in this regard, the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 was introduced as a mandatory requirement. Furthermore, the Foreign Employment Bureau continues to provide targeted pre-departure training for workers depending on the employment requirement of the destination country. The labour dispute conciliation mechanism was decentralized through the appointment of Conciliation Officers for regional and district centers. Moreover, the Web-based Recruitment System (WRS) was introduced to facilitate agencies to make the recruitment process more efficient. Last year the Government introduced a loan scheme for the migrant workers, mainly in domestic sector, to construct their houses. Another loan scheme was introduced to facilitate self-employment of returnee migrant workers. These interventions have been very popular among migrant workers.

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that regional consultative processes (RCPs) can play a key role in sharing our experiences and gain from best practices. Sri Lanka, since assumption of the Chair of the Colombo Process¹ in October 2013, was conscious that the Colombo Process could also give us an opportunity to collectively engage with countries and regions of destination with regard to the protection and welfare of migrant workers. It was also collectively decided to pursue the interests of Colombo Process countries in ensuring that due recognition is given to migration as one of the priority areas of the post-2015 development agenda.

¹ The eleven Colombo Process countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

Sri Lanka as the Chair in Office, has spearheaded a Strategic Vision/Road map based on five thematic areas, namely;

- i) Review the Qualification Recognition Processes including transnational accreditation and monitoring
- ii) Promote Cheaper, Faster & Safer Transfer of Remittances
- iii) Ethical Labour Recruitment Practices
- iv) Effective Pre-departure Orientation & Empowerment
- v) Develop a database on the economic trends in the destination countries

Having collaborated under the theme of "International Labour Migration for Prosperity: Adding Value by Working Together" in pursuing these areas, the comprehensive Concluding Statement adopted following the first Senior Official Meeting (SOM) of the Colombo Process countries in Colombo on 7 May 2014, refers to the tangible action agreed upon by the 11 CP countries on issues pertaining to these key labour migration principles. We have further deliberated on these areas during the Second SOM in Colombo in October 2014, and importantly agreed on the need to have a self-funding mechanism for the group.

The Colombo Process has also identified the importance of engaging with greater vigour and credibility with countries of labour destination through the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) and other international processes including the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). In this context, shortly after assuming the Chair-in-Office of the Colombo Process, Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare of Sri Lanka met with the Chair of the ADD on cooperation in the ADD on issues which have synergy with the CP such as Pre-departure orientation, Qualification recognition process, Comprehensive information orientation programmes and Recruitment standards. We have also actively engaged in the Senior Official Meeting (SOM), as well as the ongoing Ministerial meeting of the ADD. The Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka, as the Geneva based Chair of the Colombo Process also participated in an 'Expert Consultation on Recruitment Practices and their Impact on Human Rights of Migrants' convened by Mr. Francois Crepeau, Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, together with the Permanent Representative of the Philippines, the current ADD Chair.

The Geneva based Experts of the Colombo Process countries will further deliberate in operationalizing these proposals, in order that we could see tangible action that benefits

migrants from all our countries by the time the Ministerial Meeting of the Colombo Process is next held in Colombo in 2015.

Mr. Chairman,

We wish to sincerely thank and appreciate our partners, especially the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other bilateral partners, including the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency, for extending technical and financial assistance to Sri Lanka and to the Colombo Process.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, we reiterate our commitment to foster support for migration that benefits both source and destination countries.

Thank you.