

Speech by Ms Shafinaz Hassendeen – OIC, ILO
Workshop on Poverty reduction through Tourism 06/08/13

Mr Gerard Mendis, President of the Chefs Guild of SL

Ms. Hema Dharmawardena, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Economic Dev.

Distinguished reps from government ministries and institutions

Distinguished guest from the tourism, hotels and catering industries

Resource Persons /colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you all today on behalf of the International Labour Organisation to this ½ day workshop on Poverty Reduction Through Tourism which we have organised in collaboration with the Chefs Guild. Let me at the outset congratulate the Chefs Guild of Sri Lanka in successfully hosting the Culinary Arts Competition that was held over the past four days and also thank them for collaborating with the ILO to launch the Toolkit on Poverty Reduction through Tourism yesterday. The toolkit is a part of the ILO's wider effort to promote decent work in the tourism industry.

Introduced in the year 2011 for universal use, especially for developing economies, the toolkit highlights how tourism can be a driver of poverty reduction and employment creation. It also summarizes recent developments in tourism and provides a vision for a more inclusive, pro-poor tourism industry.

The importance of tourism for job creation and poverty reduction cannot be overestimated. Today, tourism is beginning to be recognized as a major source of economic growth globally, especially in poor countries, and thus can be a force for poverty reduction.

Hotels, Catering and Tourism (HCT) is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in countries around the world. It is very labour-intensive and is a significant source of development and employment, especially for those with limited access to the labour market, such as women, youth, migrant workers and rural populations. The industry has potential for poverty reduction by developing a value chain approach to sustainable tourism development and reducing leakages by building linkages with other sectors.

From a Sri Lankan perspective the introduction of the toolkit is a timely intervention as it aligns well with the national priorities reflected in the MC and articulated in the NHREP. Tourism has been identified as a major thrust industry receiving top priority of the government. It has set targets for 2.5 million tourist arrivals and to have 500,000 persons in direct employment within the tourist industry by the year 2016. Development and promotional processes have been accelerated to achieve this goal. Prime among targets set for tourism will be tourism benefits that are envisaged to filter into rural economies and benefit the rural communities. Lack of knowledge and understanding of the industry particularly at a rural level among all stakeholders and low skill levels within the industry are concerns to be addressed on a priority basis.

It is quite clear that in Sri Lanka the SME tourism sector is growing faster than the conventional star class establishments. I read an article in the newspaper last week that said that in 2010/2011 the FGN (i.e. foreign guest nights which an indication of the number of foreign tourists, who stay in approved establishments) showed a much greater increase in the SME sector (80%) than in the formal sector (21%). The increase in 2012 of FGN in star class graded establishments was only 0.5%, while FGN in the smaller supplementary sector grew by 5.5%.

We believe the toolkit localized and used at a rural level among Small and Medium Enterprises and other stakeholders will be a very useful tool in this context. The Toolkit that we are going to introduce to you today is one of a number of toolkits that the ILO HQ has developed for promotion of tourism. We planned to have this half day workshop not only to introduce the toolkit to the stakeholders of the tourist industry in Sri Lanka but to create a discussion through which valuable inputs could be generated towards adapting the toolkit to the Sri Lankan context and informing us as to how we should take it forward.

We have with us today Mr. Wolfgang Weinz, Senior Tourism Specialist from the Sectoral department of ILO in Geneva who will provide an overview of the toolkit, Mr. Dilip de Silva, ILO Bangladesh, who will present the introduction of the 5 key chapters of the toolkit and Mr. Priantha Fernando, National Consultant, ILO who will share his insights on how the ILO tourism tool kit will benefit SMEs in Sri Lanka.

The ILO is the UN specialised agency that promotes social justice in the world of work. It is dedicated to bringing decent work and livelihoods, job-related security and better living standards to the people of both poor and rich countries. We in the ILO would also like to stress that people need more than just jobs. Women and men need to have equal opportunities and access to decent jobs. They need to be able to conduct their jobs in a setting that respects basic and fundamental rights, they want access to necessary social protection and they want the opportunity to express themselves freely, they want to participate and communicate in decision making that affects their lives and their jobs. Promoting such jobs will protect and also empower people.

This is because the ILO is convinced, and this is increasingly backed up by evidence, that decent work makes good economic sense and is not just a matter of “the rights that people have”. The **Working Conditions (Hotels and**

Restaurants) Convention,1991 (No. 172) and the Working Conditions (Hotels and Restaurants) Recommendation, 1991 (No. 179) set minimum standards to improve working conditions, training and career prospects in hotels, restaurants and similar establishments, and noted that collective bargaining is required to enhance job security. The toolkit will also address some of these aspects.

In concluding I would like to invite everyone to actively participate and share your valuable inputs towards adapting the toolkit to the Sri Lankan context to ensure that this emerging growth sector will promote not just economic development for the country but promote robust development premised upon social justice for all.

Thank you.