

Speech for Simrin
National Multi-sector Policy Forum on Labour Migration
2nd October 2018 at Galle Face 2, Galle Face Hotel.

-Secretary, Ministry of Telecommunications, Digital Infrastructure and Foreign Employment,

Mr. Chulananda Perera

-Additional Secretaries and senior officials of Ministries,

-Heads and representatives of Government institutions including the Bureau of Foreign Employment & Department of Manpower and Employment

-Fellow colleagues from UN family

-Employers Organizations

-Trade Union members

-Civil Society Organizations and think tanks

Ladies and Gentlemen

It was indeed a pleasure for ILO to be a part of the process of developing Sri Lanka's first labour migration policy in 2007/2008 and to provide technical support to the Ministry thereafter to implement the policy after its acceptance by Cabinet and now here we are supporting its updating 10 years later.

Next year the International Labour Organization celebrate 100 years of social justice and decent work and 70 years in Sri Lanka. Wouldn't it be significant to launch this revised policy in the centenary 70 or 100/70 year.

As you may know, the current labour migration policy is based on ILO's Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration that supports and guides governments to develop their policies and regulations on migration for employment.

I couldn't agree more with Secretary when he said the landscape and nature of migration for employment has changed and is continuing to change. It is getting more and more complex. ILO estimates there to be 150 million migrant workers in the global work force and this number will only increase with demand for lower and semi-skilled jobs increasing other push factors that increase the risk of exploitation or workers. Host governments are introducing new laws and policies for migrant workers, while origin country governments are skilling their workers to ensure decent work conditions. Many are taking measures to curb negative impacts and ensure migrants have a positive experience in their search for decent work and a better life.

The time has come to look at migrant workers in a more dignified light - we need to see them as partners in development and consult them and engage with them more often rather than deciding what is best for them.

ILO has been working closely with the Government on migrant worker issues, led by the Ministry handling the subject of Foreign Employment, employers and workers organizations and Civil Society. Our labour migration programme has expanded in the past few years and I am happy to share that we now have 4 Projects supporting the National Labour Migration Policy and regulations across the spectrum from recruitment, to skills, remittances to response to exploitation.

I urge the government to seriously consider the ratification of the most important migrant worker Conventions that impact Sri Lankan women and men working overseas. I know the draft policy framework that will be shared with you today is in line already with these international conventions.

Namely :

- a.) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its follow Up in 1998,
- b.) Migration for Employment Convention 97,
- c.) Migrant Workers (supplementary provisions) Convention 143,
- d.) The multi-lateral framework on international labour migration, and the most recent
- e.) ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines on fair recruitment, among others.

The Core principles of this policy framework is given to you separately as a hand out in your dockets.

Sri Lanka must show leadership in adhering to these standards. It is not only about seeking protection for our workers overseas, but also it makes social and economic sense, not to mention political sense.

The implementation of the policy was reviewed on behalf of the Ministry and ILO developed a policy brief to inform all stakeholders the status of the policy. We find that more than 60 per cent of the planned work has been implemented and the remaining are at different stages of completion. That's encouraging. However we felt the need to study current trends and emerging issues in order to support the Ministry to update the policy which still remains relevant in several areas.

I would like to highlight some background papers that paved the way to revise the strategies and focus areas of the policy. These were commissioned by ILO for the Ministry and all stakeholders to provide as an evidence base for updating the policy.

- Review of the Implementation of the NLMP
- Impact of regulations that have had negative impacts on female migration (FBR)
- International labour standards for the protection of migrant workers, frameworks, guidelines and Sustainable Development Goals supporting fair and regular labour migration
- The changing trends and profiles of Sri Lanka's migrant women and men
- The perspectives of the migrant worker community through returned migrants, in-service migrants on short holiday and family members of migrant workers
- Effectiveness of welfare programmes for migrant workers
- Stock taking of implementation of the reintegration national action plan
- Gaps in reintegration efforts and recommendations for improvement
- Issues of in-bound migrant workers

We trust the usefulness of these papers go beyond just the portfolio of labour migration but informs several other sectors on how they can coordinate and collaborate better to make the migration sector more effective. A whole of Government approach referred to by Secretary is what we all envisage for our policies and programmes.

Based on today's agenda with group work ahead, I believe you will give your valuable inputs and your fullest cooperation towards a more collaborative effort of making the lives and hopes of migrant workers better.

I would like to thank the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for leveraging ILO's technical support by funding 2 previous phases and now the 3rd phase of engagement for policy implementation support. Your partnership remains a valuable one for ILO.

I thank the Government and all the stakeholders for their continued partnership in this area of labour migration and wish you success in your deliberations this morning.