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Regional Symposium on Deployment of Workers Overseas: A Shared Responsibility

**Address by Dr. Dora Rapold, Ambassador of Switzerland
15 July 2008**

Honourable Special Guest, Secretary Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment
Mr Hyder, Secretary-General of BD Employers' Federation
Mr. Mesbahuddin Ahmed, Representative of the National Coordination Committee for Workers Education
Representatives of the ILO
Excellencies
Government Representatives
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Introduction: Relevance of migration

Migration is as old as human history. Today, around 200 million migrants worldwide send back 300 billion \$ per year. It's a global phenomenon.

If I may take the case of my own country. Switzerland has always been and continues to be a country of emigration and immigration. Today, over 20% of the population are foreigners i.e. people who came to Switzerland during the last one or two decades. And over 10% of Swiss nationals are living abroad, in other countries.

All over the world migrants are an important economic factor. Taking my country again as an example: Many immigrants have brought innovation to our society. Our famous watch industry was modernised by a Lebanese immigrant who created the famous Swatch. Thanks to him, the Swiss watch industry survived and continues to play a leading role worldwide. Immigrants are also represented in semi-skilled jobs, in construction, tourism etc. – sectors which would not survive without the work force of immigrants.

In summary and in general: Migration has positive effects on economies, contributes to new ideas and innovation and is the backbone of many economies – be it as part of the labour force of a country or through remittances sent back to the countries of origin.

2. Relevance of migration in South Asia

Migration is widespread in South Asia and in Asia in general. Bangladesh e.g., with abundant manpower force, depends on people's migration. Bangladesh faces 4 million new job seekers every year while the yearly creation of new jobs is below that figure. The survival of many of them and their families depends on finding a job in a neighbouring country, in the Middle East and on other continents. We all meet them at the airport when groups of migrants are boarding airplanes. Bangladeshi migrants are known to be very hard working. Quite often

they have invested not only the family savings but also the savings of a whole community. A lot of pressure is on them to succeed abroad, quite often in very difficult conditions.

3. Rationale for the Symposium and Swiss Support

Considering the high importance of migration for most of the economies and the economies in this region, for the families of migrants and the individuals – conditions of migration and rights of migrants in most of the countries continue to be an issue and a challenge, getting not sufficient attention. In many countries, migrant conditions need improvement. This requires regional exchange and cooperation. This Symposium is an important event to contribute to such regional cooperation aiming at the improvement of the conditions of labour migrants.

When the ILO approached us about 2 years ago with the idea of such a regional conference, we were very much interested to support it – for many reasons.

Migration is an important issue for us.

The so-called “Berne Initiative” - which aims at obtaining better management of migration at the national, regional and global level through enhanced cooperation between States – is an initiative originally promoted and funded by Switzerland.

Just recently, SDC, the Swiss Development Cooperation has defined migration as a key global issue for its work worldwide and in the regions.

And last but not least, for many years, employment and income generation has been a priority theme in Switzerland’s development cooperation with most of the countries, and in particular with partner countries in South Asia. It’s about the creation of favourable conditions so that people may have decent jobs, may overcome poverty and contribute to economic growth.

It’s about creating a “win-win-situation”, at all levels, for all parties involved – government, migrants and private sector.

4. My Expectations

The “Symposium on Deployment of Workers Overseas, a Shared Responsibility” is an important initiative and opportunity, as representatives of different sectors of society and representatives of 10 countries are participating.

Accordingly, my expectations are

- that key stakeholders and actors may use the opportunity to get to know each other,
- that they may get to know good practices and learn from each other
- that such an exchange is not an isolated event but
- will contribute to enhance future cooperation on the migration issue, and,
- last but not least, that the Symposium will come up with concrete ideas for next steps, which will contribute to the concrete improvement of workers deployment and migration

I would like to thank ILO for this important initiative. And thank ILO *and* the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment of Bangladesh for jointly organising this Symposium, bringing key stakeholders and expertise together in this event.

I wish you all a fruitful exchange, and I am looking forward to the concrete results the participants of this Symposium will come up tomorrow afternoon.

Thank you.