

IOM 88th Session – November 2004

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Sarala Fernando, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka

Mr. Chairman,

In the past demographers treated migration as a natural phenomenon tending towards the occupation of habitable empty space on the globe, thus tracing the modern historical movements of persons across continents, to a few causes such as famine, economic and social breakdown, reconstruction in the aftermath of war etc. However, today we are facing quite a different situation. The forces of globalization fuelled by new technological developments, continue to create impetus leading to a dramatic increase in mobility at all levels; at the same time, there is a growing awareness that the phenomenon of migration is both complex and sensitive in the analysis of costs and benefits. The design of appropriate policy responses poses a considerable challenge.

My delegation has read with interest the IOM paper on “Valuing Migration – costs, benefits, opportunities and challenges” which is an advance summary of the forthcoming IOM publication, World Migration Report for 2005. The IOM paper correctly recognizes the overall valuable contribution migration makes to both sending and receiving states, although the social, economic and political issues involved are multifaceted, with positive and negative outcomes. In terms of cultural diversity and creative impulses, we would also agree that migration has indeed made a substantial contribution to the advancement of human civilization.

The IOM paper reminds us that migration by its very nature is a cross cutting issue which is currently being discussed on a number of fora and that the collective contribution of different actors and organisations involved have enriched the discussion and broadened our horizons.

We welcomed the interactive dialogue at this session with representatives of the Global Commission whose final report in 2005 will make a significant contribution to the discussion of the High Level Dialogue on International Migration scheduled for 2006. Our dialogue, at this IOM session, we hope, would have sensitized the GCIM to address the issue of IOM’s relationship with the UN and to assign it a role commensurate with IOM’s increasing responsibilities and capacity in policy assistance and technical co-operation.

Mr. Chairman,

This session of the Council will be discussing and adopting decisions on a number of important issues. We note that IOM’s decentralization initiative is being implemented in keeping with the organization’s goals of increased efficiency. The programme and budget for 2005 and that of outstanding contributions to the administrative part of the budget will assume great relevance to the functioning of the organization. As a measure of Sri Lanka’s support to IOM, I am pleased to announce that our contributions for 2004 have been settled in full.

We also wish to commend IOM for having striven over the years to meet the changing challenges of international migration. Over the last 50 years IOM has witnessed an expansion and active growth in membership, (this year we welcome the new admissions of Turkey, Brazil, Bahamas and Estonia), testifying to international recognition of the important role this organization can play in meeting the existing and emerging challenges. IOM's flexible structure and effective management has enabled it to successfully respond to new opportunities and special niches such as the creation of the International Migration Law department, which provides a ready database to reinforce our understanding of international legal instruments. IOM could also focus on activities aimed at universalizing legal instruments in the field such as the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families.

I must also place on record IOM's valuable service in Sri Lanka in the provision of core humanitarian and peace building support. The ceasefire in Sri Lanka has held now for over 2 ½ years and international assistance has been vital in consolidating support for the peace process and facilitating the moves towards a final settlement.

We also commend the activities taken by IOM in the field of technical assistance and capacity building in labour migration management. Sri Lanka has over a million migrant workers overseas, especially in the Middle East, predominantly women, who have special needs in adjusting to alien socio-cultural environments. Recognizing the feminisation of migration, over the last few years, IOM's assistance in projects on pre-departure orientation, sustainable return and re-integration as well as on mitigation of irregular migration have strengthened the capacity of both the Department of Immigration and Emigration and the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment to better meet the needs of our migrant workers.

We also follow with interest, IOM's emerging work on the role of remittances. Remittances are the largest net foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka and were sufficient to cover 92% of the trade deficit in 2003. Current on-going work on issues such as converting unofficial flows to official channels, channeling remittances and productive outcomes for investment are important aspects in the broader objective of remittance management. Any IOM initiative in this regard for more exchanges of experience at the regional level would be timely and useful.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman