

**Statement of the delegation of Sri Lanka at the 92<sup>nd</sup> session of the IOM Council,  
30 November 2006**

Madam President,

My delegation joins previous speakers in congratulating you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. We also pledge our full cooperation in your efforts to steer this Council session to a successful conclusion. My delegation also congratulates Nepal and Montenegro who were admitted as new members of IOM during this Council, demonstrating the importance that states attach to the issues of migration and acknowledging the leadership role of IOM in this field. We also congratulate Qatar Charity on its admission as an Observer of IOM. We listened carefully to the report by the Director General which touched on major areas of IOM's work during the period under review.

Madam President,

This year has been a landmark year for migration, placing this issue high on the agenda of two major UN sessions which discussed the importance of migration as a catalyst for development, first during the 2006 session of the ECOSOC in Geneva and later on at the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development in New York during the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the UN General Assembly. We note with satisfaction the follow up to the HLD with regard to the proposed Global Forum on Migration and Development of which the first meeting is to be hosted by Belgium. We trust that IOM will continue to take a leadership role in this endeavour to mainstream issues of migration in the UN and international agenda, in a coherent and coordinated manner, bringing in all stakeholders.

At present there are more than one million Sri Lankans, equivalent to around one seventh of the workforce, who work overseas. The remittances by migrant workers is the largest source of foreign exchange for the country and in 2006 total remittances continued to grow significantly. The Government therefore considers it a high priority to provide and expand the many services and assistance to migrant workers through the Ministry of Labour and the Bureau of Foreign Employment and we are continuously upgrading promotional and welfare programmes for this sector. We have also initiated new

programmes to address socio economic and physiological problems of the families of migrant workers.

Most recently IOM has provided vital assistance to evacuate stranded expatriate Sri Lankan workers from Lebanon when conflict erupted there last July. We wish on this occasion to record our sincere appreciation to IOM for its speedy response and to the generosity of donors which enabled the stranded workers many of them women to reach the safety of nearby countries and repatriation to Sri Lanka.

Madam President,

Repatriation and evacuation of migrant workers when conflicts erupt in host countries is a major problem faced by countries of origin, which do not have the capacity to manage alone, and often look to IOM with its valuable experience, to provide urgent assistance in times of humanitarian emergencies. During the Lebanon crisis we had however noted that IOM's humanitarian emergency operations are hampered by the lack of any Contingency Fund for such purposes and we would wish to propose that IOM submit to the next Council session its views and proposals in this regard.

Thank you.