



Statement by Sri Lanka

107th Council of the International Organization for Migration

5 - 8 December 2016

Mr. Chairman

At the outset I take this opportunity to congratulate His Excellency Mr. John Quinn, Permanent Representative of Australia on his election as the Chairperson of the 107th Council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). I wish to also take this opportunity to congratulate the IOM, Director General Ambassador William Swing and the staff, on the 65th anniversary celebration of the IOM, and on the formal entry of IOM to the United Nations System as a “related Organization”, remarkably enhancing the engagement of the UN on migration.

Migration being a complex and cross cutting area with inherent challenges and opportunities in its train, no country would be in a position to find solutions on their own, and there will be ‘no one size fits all’ solution. Although it is amply clear that migration benefits the individuals as well as the societies of origin, transit and destination to enrich the socio-economic fabric, it has not yet reached a point that the rights, wellbeing and protection of the migrants are fully appreciated and respected. Though much work has been done in these areas with the adoption and implementation of legislative, governance and policy measures, much remains to be accomplished nationally, regionally and globally, to make migration an informed choice rather than a necessity.

It is in this context, that we welcome the successful adoption of the New York Declaration on ‘Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants’, as a watershed moment of global political commitment in finding durable solutions to address the issues surrounding human mobility due to a diverse array of push and pull factors. We emphasize on the need to maintain cohesion and consistency with the rights and obligations of States under international law when implementing the two Compacts aimed at safe, orderly, regular migration and a comprehensive response on refugees, by year 2018. We fully support a ‘whole of system’ and ‘whole of government’ approach that is centered on the rights and overall well-being of the human being, in the development of the Global Compact on migration.

Mr. Chairman,

We therefore appreciate including a dedicated panel discussion on the Global Compact for migration in our Agenda which will allow this august Council to share insights of the Geneva-based delegates and agencies on the process as well as on their expectation on the substance of the Compact on Migration. We take this opportunity to highlight some preliminary comments in our national capacity as follows;

On the procedure:

- It must respect the State-led nature and keep the process open and transparent allowing all stakeholders, governments, private sector, civil society and all others interested to contribute as per the established UN rules of procedures. A practical mechanism to link Geneva and New York delegations regularly and equally, in the process of developing the Global Compact is essential.
- Given the extensive and unique expertise on migration, both at policy and practical day-to-day work on the ground, the role of IOM must be spelt out clearly in the modalities resolution, giving effect to para 12 of the Annex II. In this context, we wish to express our support for the DG of the IOM to serve as the Secretary-General of the 2018 Conference.
- To utilize the existing frameworks at regional and inter-governmental level such as Regional Consultative Processes and the GFMD to mobilize comparative expertise and generate substantive inputs for the Global Compact. For example, Sri Lanka wishes to inform this Council that in the area of contractual labour migration, the Asian labour sending countries have been putting collective efforts for the last 13 years through the Colombo Process which can add value to the substantive preparations, given the experience of the 12 CP countries in managing for over 45 million contractual migrant workers from the region. It has made progress and gathered substantive knowledge and best practices on areas such as ethical labour recruitment, remittances, skills development, and pre departure orientation that has direct relevance to the Sustainable Development target 10.7, and Goal 8, which can serve as the framework for the Global Compact on migration.

Mr. Chairman,

Regarding our expectations on the substance of the Global Compact, we support a focused, forward-looking and action oriented outcome document with all the four elements presented by the two Co-Chairs, namely;

- A political declaration reiterating commitment to migrants and refugees
- Actionable and practical commitments
- Predictable and substantive means of implementation
- A mechanism to follow-up progress on implementation.

We also expect that the Compact would propose clear and tangible action on inclusion of migrants in host countries, in particular regarding their access to basic services such as health, justice and education. In this regard it is my pleasure to inform that as announced by Sri Lanka at the last Council session, we are making arrangements with the IOM and WHO to co-host the second Global Consultation on Migrant Health in Colombo Sri Lanka from 21-23 February 2017. We hope that this deliberation will result in important substantive inputs for the upcoming negotiation process.

We believe that the Compact on Migration will help fill implementation gaps rather than introducing new normative or legislative frameworks. It would be important to take a proper assessment on available mechanisms, strategies and policies and understand the impediments in making them operational. How the elements in the Global Compact relates to existing key commitments related to migration, declared in the Post 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) on means of implementation, and the High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, as well as in the Sendai Framework and in the Paris Climate Change Agreement etc.

Mr. Chairman,

While we look into new and innovative ways of tackling the challenges of human mobility, in particular those related to irregular migration leading to human trafficking and smuggling in persons, we require closer cooperation among countries, as well as means to provide assistance to the victims. In Sri Lanka a multi-stakeholder national level Anti Human Trafficking Task Force led by the Ministry of Justice is implementing a strategic national action plan (2015-2019) based on the four-Ps, Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Investigation and Partnerships. An Anti-Trafficking Unit has been set up in the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau to ensure awareness and build capacity of partners.

We recognize migration as a shared responsibility, and in that context, we have made considered efforts at raising awareness and encouraging migration of skilled labour through regular channels. We believe that the Diaspora communities are an untapped source in helping migrants to assimilate into the new environment, in particular in supporting the psycho-social wellbeing of migrants and in promoting social dialogue and engagement between the host society and the migrants.

Similarly Mr. Chairman, the welfare of the families left-behind by migrants and the ability for them to be connected regularly is an important factor, as it affects the overall productivity, efficiency and the moral conduct of the migrants while abroad. Sri Lanka has deployed over 1000 graduate development officers within the entire country on a 'migrant protection programme called "Shramika Surekuma", to make needs assessments, collect data and guide the necessary counseling of the migrant family members. Also educational scholarships for the children, school materials for needy children, vocational training scholarships for school leavers and low interest loan facilities for housing and self-employment through State banks etc have been provided for migrant families.

As the incoming Chair of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, Sri Lanka looks forward to work closely building partnerships among both the sending and destination countries of the Forum for mutual benefit.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank IOM for its support to Sri Lanka over the years, and we assure our support and commitment to the IOM's efforts in implementing the principles and objectives set in the Migration Governance Framework approved by the Council.

Thank you.