

## **High-Level Segment on “impact of COVID-19 on borders, migration and mobility: learning lessons and preparing for the future”**

Statement by **H.E. Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP,**

Hon’ble Foreign Minister, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh

*Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*

**Mr. Antonio Vitorino, Director General of IOM**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

*Assalamu Alaikum.* Peace be upon you all.

In the beginning, I would like to thank IOM for convening this high-level meeting to discuss the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on borders, migration and mobility.

**Excellencies,**

2. We are completing the second year of unprecedented public health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has disrupted all aspects of life, but it has particularly affected human mobility, imposed by countries to limit transmission of the virus. As a result, many migrants have been left stranded in host countries without food, shelter, access to essential services or the ability to return home. This has also caused massive job losses and eventual forcible return of the migrant workers to their homes. The resulting reduction of remittance flow has jeopardised the lifeline of millions of families in the global South.

**Distinguished guests,**

3. More than 10 million Bangladeshi migrants work abroad. They are the second largest source of our foreign currency earning. Remittance is an important driver of our success in eradication of poverty and rural development.

4. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the outward movement of migrants from Bangladesh has come down to an alarming low level. At the same time, thousands of our migrant workers have returned, losing their jobs in destination countries. Many of them are yet to go back with the uncertainty to remigrate and be reinstated in their overseas employment.

5. In the backdrop of this grim scenario, we have taken several short-term and long-term initiatives to help our migrant workers. I personally talked to my counterparts in several destination countries during the pandemic, and requested them not to send our migrant workers back. We suggested to reassign the migrant workers from Bangladesh to different sectors. We also sent food and other essential stuff to those countries as gesture of our goodwill so that those could be distributed to our migrant workers, those who are without jobs or earnings. We are happy that our efforts paid results. We also took different initiatives to secure the livelihoods of the returnee migrants. We have launched two soft loan schemes of approximately 62.5 million dollars and 25 million dollars for them. We have different skilling and up-skilling training programmes for our migrant workers.

Moreover, we have formed a Working Committee to facilitate and fast-track the safe and dignified return of Bangladeshi migrant workers stranded in different destination countries. A returnee database has been launched with support from IOM.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

6. We all know that the migrants contribute to the societies and economies of both origin and the host countries. It is, therefore, imperative that the host countries provide necessary healthcare during this crisis and ensure that the migrants have full access to tests, medical care, vaccines against this deadly virus. And also, they must be provided with essential food items. As we strive for an inclusive and sustainable response and recovery, migrant workers must be a part of the solution. Migrants should not be left behind as we are committed to achieving the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To that end, allow me to make a few suggestions:

**First**, states must demonstrate political will to ensure that all returnee migrant workers are reinstated in their jobs when they return to host countries.

**Second**, the destination countries must enhance social security measures for migrant workers, including their access to healthcare and job security. Special attention needs to be paid to the migrant workers, including female migrant workers, working in informal sectors in their destination countries.

**Third**, governments and all other stakeholders must recognise that universal, equitable and timely access to COVID-19 vaccines by all people, including migrant workers, is crucial for resuming human mobility.

**Fourth**, comprehensive and updated data and analysis of the impact of COVID-19 related movement restrictions on migrants are necessary for future policy frameworks at national, regional and global levels.

**Fifth**, we must find more predictable, secure and innovative pathways for safer cross border human mobility. A standard, secure and universally applicable system is necessary.

**And finally**, we need to work on formulating a multi-stakeholder and integrated approach for implementing global policy frameworks on migration and human mobility.

7. To conclude, let me assure everyone that as a GCM Champion country, Bangladesh will continue to support the work of IOM for the wellbeing of migrants, implementation of GCM objectives, and pro-migrant global migration governance. May I also add that migrant workers and other migrants normally create jobs. They do not take away jobs. In many cities, where there are more migrants than the population, for example, New York, unemployment is minimal, because migrant workers are also entrepreneurs and they create jobs.

I thank you all.