



**The Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the
United Nations and other International Organizations in
Geneva**

**Council of International Organization for Migration
103rd Session**

Agenda Item 9: General Debate

**Statement by Hon. Dilan Perera
Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion & Welfare**

(Geneva, 26th November 2013)



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103rd Session of the Council of IOM
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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset let me congratulate Ambassador Chavez Basagoitia on his election and for his leadership in steering our discussions. Allow me also to thank the Director General of the IOM for his comprehensive report and the Secretariat for facilitating our work for this session.

Though the number of annual departures on foreign employment is relatively small, Sri Lanka earns 8.5 % of its GDP from remittances. This is 35% of the country's foreign income and covers 24% of the labour force. Remittance income is a number of multiples higher than the other sectors of the economy. In view of these factors, remittances are crucial for Sri Lanka's development and the successful achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Sri Lanka will play its full part in developing the post 2015 Millennium goal development architecture, emphasizing on Migration and Development.

But this success hides some disturbing features. The bulk of migrant workers fall under the unskilled categories. Through committed efforts over the years, this has been reduced to 40% today from 52% in 2010. Efforts are underway to reduce this number to 25%. The successful attainment of this goal should be underpinned by enhancing the skills of the female migrant workers and not by placing barriers on them. Action has been taken to make all migrant workers obtain at least a NVQ3 (National Vocational Qualification 3) certificate, which is internationally recognized and portable. By this means, migrant workers, specially females, will be re-skilled to obtain higher level employment such as housekeeping assistants, caregivers, nurse aids, etc., thereby considerably strengthening their position in the power relationship with the employer.

Mr. Chairman,

In Sri Lanka's holistic approach towards migrant workers, they are primarily considered and treated as human beings and secondarily as income generators. Programmes have been devised to educate labour agents in managerial programmes. Sri Lanka has formed the *Rataviruwo* Organisation, *Rataviruwo* meaning 'migrant economic heroes and their families'. Considerable attention has been given to the re-entry of migrant workers to the country and to provide them with a welcoming and accommodative return. A special institution has been created manned by graduates, in all divisions of the country, to attend to their re-entry needs such as providing training in building entrepreneurship skills, attending to trauma and psycho - social problems caused by migration, mentoring families in the absence of the migrant worker, and providing housing support programs for migrant families. In order to honour these heroes and heroines of Sri Lanka's development efforts, Sri Lanka has built a raft of welfare measures, like scholarships for migrant workers children etc.

With Sri Lanka's recent assumption as the Chair of Colombo Process, Sri Lanka will do its utmost to share its experience, and bring together, the eleven countries and nine observers of this group, to address common interests, like meeting the mismatches between supply and demand and applying ethical concepts to management. In her effort, Sri Lanka will stand by the principles enunciated in the Dhaka Declaration made by Colombo Process countries in 2011, the Abu Dhabi Declaration delivered in Abu Dhabi in 2008 and the recently enunciated principles of the UN Assembly's High Level Dialogue-II.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been a pillar of strength supporting Sri Lanka's efforts to give our migrant workers employment with dignity. IOM had been always receptive and responsive to our concerns. We wholeheartedly thank the IOM for its support and look forward to continuing our fruitful engagement with the organization.