



SRI LANKA

Statement

By

Hon. Athauda Seneviratne
Minister-of Labour Relations And Foreign Employment
Leader of the Delegation of Sri Lanka

At the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development
High-Level Plenary Meeting

New York, 14th September, 2006

(Please check against delivery)

You Excellency President to the UN **General Assembly**
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates

Let me begin with conveying the greetings of President and the people of Sri Lanka to you and all the participants attending this High-Level Dialogue. This High Level dialogue on *International Migration and Development* will help us to identify appropriate ways and means to maximize its development benefits arising out of migration phenomena.

We are pleased that International migration has come to the top of the global agenda this year and it is our expectation this trend will continue so that we could address all aspects of this issue in a more comprehensive manner. We are pleased that there is emerging global consensus that labor migration is a positive force for development.

As rightly highlighted in the Secretary General's report, there **is convergence** of views that migration is development-friendly phenomena, benefiting both countries of origin and **destination. Remittances to developing countries are now more than three times the volume of** overseas aid, and close behind the level of global foreign direct investment. The overseas diaspora also represent a development resource for the home country for promoting investments, transfer of skills, and stimulating exports for development.

We are also concerned that the focus of this meeting and the current international emphasis on issues connected to migration has not placed an adequate emphasis on the need for a rights based approach to international migration. We have also failed to define clearly, the linkages between economic growth, sustainable development and migration and more work is needed in this regard.

There are number of other matters for consideration. For example policies in developed countries continue to favour the admission of skilled workers rather than low skilled workers. Developing countries can ill afford such brain drain as loss of trained manpower skills affect the level and quality of services needed in education and healthcare in the country of origin. At the same time the protection and treatment of workers is a issue of concern. There are countless stories of victims of trafficking, female domestic workers in force labour situations, non-payment of wages, poor conditions of work, growing racism and discrimination. Women migrant workers are particularly vulnerable and it must not be forgotten that they represent **about half of the total global migrant workforce. In some diaspora communities we have also** observed the emergence of illegal activities and extortion of the migrants for purposes of **funding insurgent movements and terrorism in their home countries.**

Clearly, there is a need for increasing international cooperation. There is already a robust body of key UN and International Conventions, which spell out a normative framework for the principles and good practices for labour migration. In this regard we call upon all States to ratify the UN Convention on the protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families in particular. The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration **can also serve as a politically binding and valuable guide. In addition, in order to curb illegal migration, opportunities must be provided for legal migration.**

If we are to promote international migration as an instrument of global development, we also need the participation of all stakeholders– governments, social partners, civil society and migrants themselves – in migration policy making. The international community also needs to achieve greater coherence and coordination in their approaches. I am happy to note that a Global Migration Group has already been formed and that Secretary-General has proposed a consultative global migration forum at the UN.

In conclusion, I would like to note that migration and development is only one element of issues pertaining to migration as well as development. Let us use this High-Level dialogue to evolve a win-win situation for origin and destination countries as well as for the migrants themselves. And it is imperative that we continue the dialogue on all migration issues at the highest levels for this purpose.

Thank you.