

**Statement by His Excellency Major General Shavendra Silva  
Ambassador and Chargé d'Affaires of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York**

FORTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

**New York, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013**

Mr. Chairman,

Let me congratulate you on your appointment to this important Committee.

We hope that this session on the theme “New trends in migration: demographic aspects” would provide a comprehensive framework, including useful inputs, for the second High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, to be held in the UN General Assembly this year. My delegation notes with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on this theme, which provides valuable information and serves as a guide for our deliberations during the session.

Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement delivered by Fiji, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

Migration is not a new phenomenon and it has been the human experience since the beginning of civilization. Some humans moved voluntarily while others were coerced to move to new lands. Today, it has become an issue because of national boundaries, restrictions on free movement, economic circumstances as well as climate change. Globalization, particularly the eased travel, connectivity induced by communication technologies, economic opportunities and political circumstances, had created many reasons for citizens to cross national boundaries - both legally and illegally. We must not forget that many developed economies of today were built by the contributions of such migrants.

Migration of transnational workers has shown a remarkable increase and is continuing. Therefore, it is imperative to consider a set of broader development objectives. Almost all internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, have clear linkages with international migration. The implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action is crucial for the eradication of poverty. Population issues must continue to be addressed in a comprehensive manner as outlined in the ICPD Programme of Action. It must

be effectively integrated into the current consultations on the post- 2015 global development agenda, including the designing of Sustainable Development Goals.

High levels of migration can also cause problems to local communities such as increasing unemployment, cultural clashes and potential demographic imbalances. Some migration policies and programmes at national levels may not have specific demographic objectives. Promoting policy coherence and institutional development is therefore imperative to ensure respect and protection of human rights of all migrants.

All member states have a collective responsibility to renew the political will to address the challenges and opportunities of international migration, both regular and irregular. We believe that we can successfully address these challenges through constructive dialogue and cooperation on the basis of common responsibility of all nations. The Commission of Population and Development can play a vital role in this regard. Addressing large resource gaps in developing countries remain crucial. Without adequate international assistance, including ODA, it is unlikely that most of the goals and targets of the Program of Action (POA) would be met.

Mr. Chairman,

Due to the strategic location in the middle of the Indian Ocean, between the East and the West, Sri Lanka has experienced migration for many centuries. Today, Sri Lanka is a country of origin of migrants to other countries and is also a recipient of migrants. According to the 2011 estimates, the net migration rate of Sri Lanka is -2.16 migrants per 1,000, which suggests that the number of emigrants is larger than immigrants. When compared with global statistics, this is still a low rate.

At present, 23% of the total labour force - approximately 1.8 million - is engaged in foreign employment and contribute significantly to our national economy. Both skilled and unskilled labour categories have recorded significant increases in migration statistics especially to the Middle East since the early 1980s. About 60% of the migrant workers are unskilled and about 48% of them are female domestic workers. Emerging East Asian economies have also provided many opportunities for Sri Lankan migrant workers. We are now in the process of increasing the percentage of skilled workers.

Concerns of Sri Lanka's women migrant worker population, particularly those in unskilled and housemaid categories, have received priority attention of the relevant line agencies and the political leadership. The Sri Lanka policy on migration provides for the

children of migrant mothers. Accordingly, special laws have been enacted to facilitate legal protection for children up to 18 years. The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) has set up a special desk at the Bandaranaike International Airport to register the details of children of migrant mothers traveling overseas for employment. The NCPA is also formulating a system to enable migrant mothers to contact their children while being employed abroad. These provisions may be further amended and strengthened.

A special agency – the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau (SLBFE) - has been established and operates under the Ministry Foreign Employment and Welfare. Every Sri Lankan leaving for employment outside Sri Lanka must register with this Bureau. We have strengthened most of our overseas Missions with Welfare Officers to help migrant workers.

Sri Lanka facilitates the welfare of all migrants and has taken measures to ensure their basic rights, including education and health. In 2009, Sri Lanka formulated the National Policy on Labour Migration with wide stakeholder consultations. There are strict policy measures and laws regarding employment of minors. To minimize the costs of social impact on migrant worker families, the Government has launched a project to encourage children to continue their education through a scholarship scheme. Another project was initiated to identify services needed by families of migrant workers such as health services, educational facilities and advisory services. These are provided through both the government and NGOs.

These projects also support initiating self-employment projects and setting up counselling centres in schools. Establishment of day care centres for children of migrant women and provision of shelters and hostels to children of migrant workers are also among measures to minimize the social costs of migration.

While we seek to control illegal migrants, Sri Lanka does not deny the migrants' their basic rights – especially health and education. We are working closely with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It provides technical assistance in training officials in charge of immigration, border security and migrants' welfare. The IOM assisted us in establishing the National Centre for Migration Statistics (NCMS) at the Department of Census and Statistics in 2008.

Mr Chairman,

Sri Lanka ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families in 1996. Sri Lanka would like to contribute constructively to the Second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and

Development at the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly in 2013. We commend your efforts under the CPD to mainstream migrants' issues in the dialogue on population and development.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.