

Sri Lanka's Statement at Commission on Population Development, 5/4/06, on
"National Experience in Population Matters: International Migration and Development"

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for the informative reports prepared for our consideration in connection with this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

The United Nations Population Division records that, there are almost 200 million international migrants today. This figure is more than double that recorded in 1980, just 26 years ago. How can this be explained? The pattern of international migration is clearly linked to globalization, which has transformed States, societies, economies and cultures in all regions, making the world an increasingly integrated and inter-dependent community. With the advent of new technologies and the expansion of the global economy, new opportunities are being created all the time, for people in different parts of the world. Nevertheless the impact of globalisation has been uneven and growing disparities in living conditions are becoming apparent. This has contributed to the increase in the scale of international migration.

International cooperation on migration issues must be enhanced to ensure that the movement of people across borders is managed in an effective and humane manner. The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document acknowledges "the important nexus between migration and development and the need to deal with the challenges and opportunities that migration presents."

The economic benefits of migration for both sending and receiving countries are increasingly becoming apparent. It has now been widely recognised that migrant workers are actively contributing to the growth and economic prosperity in receiving countries. In addition, sustained levels of migration have been recorded as offsetting natural reduction of the working age population in many receiving countries.

On the other hand, remittances from migrant workers are a significant source of foreign exchange to many developing countries, even surpassing ODA and revenue from

traditional exports and play an important role in off-setting the impact of the trade deficit on the current account. Remittances have a direct and immediate impact on the receiving communities. In this context, the migration of Sri Lankans for overseas employment has contributed significantly towards reducing unemployment and poverty, especially in rural parts of the country. Further, migrants who have developed and improved their skills abroad, can both contribute to the development of receiving countries and transfer and infuse knowledge, skills and technology into countries of origin.

A significant amount of worker remittances are still coming into the country through informal channels, with implications for misuse of these funds by terrorists and other criminal elements. In order to counter this concerning trend, the State Banks in Sri Lanka are expanding their network of branches throughout the country. The government has attempted to encourage investment and long term financial planning among returnee migrant workers by offering an array of credit schemes and State Banks have increased interest rates for foreign currency accounts and other loan benefits to encourage savings.

The welfare and protection of migrants is of paramount importance to Sri Lanka. In this connection, Sri Lanka urges Member States that have not already done so to consider becoming parties to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which entered into force in July 2003. The Convention is one of the seven core instruments on human rights, which lays out standards for the treatment of and the protection of the welfare and rights of migrants.

The High-level Dialogue to be held later this year, will provide an important opportunity to explore the many dimensions, opportunities and challenges of migration. The time has come to mainstream migration policy discussion in the UN agenda. It is vital in this context to establish appropriate mechanisms for this purpose.

In a world that is inter-dependent and that values freedom, rights and dignity of the individual, it is essential that we, the international community take necessary steps to ensure that all migrants are treated as human beings with equal rights, wherever they live and wherever they come from. Further, it is important to manage Migration in such a way to enable a win-win situation for countries of the North and of the South.