
Bureau of Foreign Employment shares SL's lessons-learned & future plans at IOM workshop in Geneva

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Mr Amal Senalankadhikara, Chairman of the Bureau of Foreign Employment and Mr Devseth Fernando, Additional General Manager of the Bureau of Foreign Employment took to the main podium at the opening session of the intercessional workshop, titled 'Protecting migrants during times of crisis : immediate responses and sustainable strategies', organized by the international Organization for Migration. The event was organized in line with the international dialogue on migration (IDM) for 2012, which aims to focus on managing migration in crisis situations. The chair of the IOM Council and Permanent Representative of Austria Mr Christian Strohal and IOM Director General William Lacy Swing, opened the two day workshop, informing the audience that the theme decided upon was based on the increasing crisis situations that migrants across the globe faced, and on the need to address migrant needs and rights in such situations. Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha, Sri Lankan Permanent Representative to the United Nations, led the Sri Lanka delegation participating at the event, meeting informally with IOM Director General and other Member State Government officials, reaffirming Sri Lanka's commitment toward the Migration discourse. The event, which was held at the World Meteorological Organisation in Geneva, was attended by over 120 Member States, collaborating UN Agencies, international organizations, and migration/development based non-governmental organizations. In the Bureau's presentation, the Additional General Manager, outlined Sri Lanka's past experience in crisis situations with its migrant populace scattered throughout the globe, beginning with the Gulf war in 1990, where, he said, more than 90,000 Sri Lankan migrants needed to be evacuated. He emphasized that in such crisis situations, preparedness and information sharing made all the difference. The lack of information regarding migrant workers was counted as one of the crucial issues the country faced when locating its migrant workers. As means of addressing this pressing issue Mr Senalankadhikara and Mr Fernando briefed those present on Sri Lanka's plans to strengthen links between local/foreign recruiting agencies and immigration authorities, in a bid to reinforce information-sharing frameworks. Plans to further provide crisis management education to labour attachés in SL diplomatic missions was also touched upon. He further noted that interstate cooperation and data/web-portal sharing was fundamental to the development of a healthy crisis-management framework. The presentation was well received, with special commendation being paid to the country's efforts toward establishing the 'Rataviru' initiative. Mr Fernando explained that the aim was to send more trained Sri Lankan professionals abroad for employment and to further protect the interests of foreign employees and those who had returned after employment. He said the initiative also created a conducive environment for those returning, to make a strong contribution toward economic development. The officials of the Bureau of Foreign Employment were also able to conduct bilateral discussions on the sidelines of the workshop.

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