

International Migrants Day Commemorated in Sri Lanka

International Migrants Day (IMD) which fell on 18th December, was commemorated in Sri Lanka at the Migrant Services Centre with the Senior Programme Coordinator IOM [International Organisation for Migration], Ms Annie Scarborough in attendance as the chief guest.

The days programme commenced with the lighting of the oil lamp, the singing of the Migrant Workers Song and the observation of 1 minutes silence in remembrance of migrant workers who had lost their lives in rendering service abroad for the cause of the motherland.

The theme for this year's congress was 'Social Security and other Welfare Schemes to Protect Migrants initiated by the Government of Sri Lanka'.

The keynote address was delivered by the Deputy General Manager SLBFE **Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment** Mr L.K. Ruhunage , while the welcome speech was given by the Secretary General National Workers Congress and Chairman Migrant Services Centre, Mr Anton Lodwick. Director Migrant Services Centre [MSC], Mr David Soysa spoke on the importance of Migrant Day, while Programme Coordinator MSC Mr Jayantha Samarathunga, spoke of the 'Commitments of the MSC towards the Protection of Migrant Workers'.

Representations by Migrant Worker Leaders were followed by a panel discussion with the panelists coming from Rabukkana, Kandy, Attanagalla and Kegalle.

According to the International Organisation for Migration [IOM], 'the successful management of global labour mobility can best be achieved through the implementation of comprehensive and cooperative policies that ensure protection of the rights of migrants and temporary contractual workers'.

According to the IOM, protecting the rights of migrants and temporary contractual workers is paramount to ensuring that global labour mobility delivers its full economic and human potential for the benefit of all concerned.

As per IOM statistics, in 2007 migrant workers from developing countries sent home through formal channels more than US \$ 240 billion, whilst at the same time making significant contributions to the economic growth and prosperity of their host countries.

According to Mr Soysa, despite their contribution to the global economy, migrant workers and temporary contractual labourers continue to face challenges in many parts of the world, including poor working conditions, as well as various forms of abuse and discrimination. "To complement strong national legal frameworks, inter state dialogue and cooperation on labour mobility are crucial for economic, developmental and social progress and are also the best guarantee of respect for the human rights of migrants".

It was noted that in January 2008 the Colombo Process Ministers will meet in Abu Dhabi with ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council and other Asian labour destination countries, in order to find practical ways to improve the well being of Asian contractual workers in the Gulf region.

A total of **46** participants **Representing 10,000 Migrant Worker Association members** were present at this year's commemoration.

The commemoration ended with the passage of following resolutions.

- (1) Sri Lanka should enter into Bilateral Agreements with labour receiving countries to ensure safe migration, protection, care and support services to migrants and safeguard their health against communicable diseases.
- (2) It was noted that migration for employment may not always be rewarding non abusive and profitable hence it was resolved that there should be adequate social security provision/ insurance cover to meet unforeseen consequences of migration.
- (3) While thanking HE Mahinda Rajapakse for introducing a Pension Scheme for migrants now serving outside the country it was resolved unanimously to request the President to provide a scheme of Compensatory payment for social security services forgone in the past 25 years; poor relief or Samurdhi money withdrawn from a large group of migrant workers numbering nearly 15 lakhs who have now returned to Sri Lanka destitute, sick and disabled after several periods of overseas employment

The commemoration concluded with the National Anthem being sung together by all participants.