Statement by Sri Lanka

at the
140th Session of the Executive Board
of the World Health Organization
23 January – 1 February 2017

Agenda Item 8.7-
Promoting the Health of Migrants

The Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations
and other International Organizations in Geneva
Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, Sri Lanka is pleased to take part in this debate on Agenda item 8.7 ‘Promoting the Health of Migrants’, which was a result of the proposals presented by Sri Lanka and Italy to this EB session. As the premier UN specialized agency on health, we also acknowledge the efforts of WHO in prioritizing the issue of health of migrants since its successful adoption of resolution 61.17 at the 2008 World Health Assembly (WHA).

Sri Lanka attaches great importance to the SDG 03- ‘Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages’ and believes that this aspect should be equally applicable to the population on the move. In this context, access to health by migrants should be recognized as a right, which will have a positive impact on migrants themselves as well as their host countries, transit as well as countries of origin in an eventuality of migrants returning back home. Similarly we note the ongoing UN intergovernmental process to develop a Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular migration and a Global Compact on Refugees pursuant to the adoption of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants by the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting held last September, and emphasize the need to recognize migrant health as a key element in the thematic discussions, which will provide clear guidance and understanding on this issue.

In addition, we also believe that further efforts should be made by the WHO and within its mechanisms in developing a clear guideline for Member States to adapt to their own national circumstance and develop necessary policy priorities. In this regard, Sri Lanka supports the proposal being considered to develop a coherent and comprehensive global migration and health strategy by the WHO.
Mr. Chairman,

In response to the renewed international attention to the topic of Migration and Health, H.E. Maithripala Sirisena, the President of Sri Lanka offered to host the 2nd Global Consultation on Migrant Health jointly with the IOM and the WHO from 21-23 February 2017 in Colombo Sri Lanka. The Consultation aims to provide a platform for the practitioners and the policy makers to identify the challenges and to make political commitments to address them. We expect High Level Ministerial participation from the invited Governments, and their contribution to the ‘Colombo Statement’ which will be the political commitment to ensure migrant health issue receives its due attention. In this context, we wish to propose that it could be a useful input to the Global Compact on Migration as well as into the proposed Global Migration and Health Strategy. Therefore we look forward for the active participation and contribution of invited Governments and other experts for this Global Consultation.

Mr. Chairman,

In addition to our global outreach, Sri Lanka has taken a number of efforts at national level to promote the migrant health agenda. Sri Lanka was recognized as the only country to voluntarily table the progress it has made in terms of the implementation of resolution 61.17 (2008) at the WHAs in 2011 and 2013. Furthermore, Sri Lanka among the few countries that have developed a comprehensive ‘National Migration Health Policy’. We appreciate the support received from IOM to conduct sectoral research studies leading to development of this evidence based policy which was launched in 2013 aiming at the promotion of health requirements of in –bound, out – bound as well as internal migrants, including their families. In this regard, we have made considerable strides in several aspects;

- a comprehensive and standardized health assessment being introduced at the pre –departure stage that will ensure better health of migrants
- ensuring health protection of Sri Lankan migrants through bilateral arrangements with the host countries,
- awareness raising and integration of returnees to the community health services,
- setting up of special hospitals through a rapid response plan to provide health care to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) resulted by the 30 year old internal conflict, during their transition period,
- Strengthening existing Public health system to respond to health issues of returning Sri Lankans who lived away from the country during the time of the conflict.
- developing a tool for a coordinated care plan which will look into the health and social issues of families, and those left behind. This will ensure that an informed judgment is made before migration and that access to health and other services can be met for family members.
- Inbound health assessment for resident visa applicants to be introduced affording health access whilst safeguarding the public health of the country.

Further, Sri Lanka under its Chairmanship of the Colombo Process, (a group of 12 Asian contractual labour sending countries) has also taken the lead in bringing the migration and health issue into the agenda of this regional consultative process. While the Colombo Process has made efforts to address the issue of health aspects of labour migrants through its ‘Pre –departure orientation’, since the 5th ministerial Meeting of the Colombo Process held in Colombo in August 2016, Member States agreed on identifying ‘Migrant Health’ as a stand-alone agenda item. In addition the 69th regional committee meeting of the SEARO held in Colombo in September 2016 also held a dedicated discussion on the issue of migration and health, reiterating the collective interest in the region.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka remains committed to promote the issue of migrant health through its national policies, as well as to share our experience and best practices by contributing to the relevant regional and international processes, while joining with like-minded partners. Thank you.