

**Draft Statement for Hon'ble Foreign Minister for the Special Session on  
*Protecting and assisting migrants during times of crisis- The way forward  
the International Dialogue on Migration (IDM), Geneva, 14 September 2012***

Respected Moderator, Director General William Lacy Swing  
Hon'ble Prime Minister of Niger,  
Hon'ble Ministers,  
Distinguished Speakers,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon!

I am delighted to be here in your midst. Allow me to begin by extending my sincere appreciation to the International Organization for Migration and its Director General for inviting me to this very important and timely dialogue on ways and means to protect migrants caught in emergencies- manmade conflicts, rapid and slow-onset natural disasters and events.

**Excellencies, distinguished guests**

In spite of wider recognition for multifarious contribution by migrants in national development and global wealth creation, they are often marginalized and deprived of human dignity in host societies. Their vulnerabilities become more pronounced during the times of crisis. Adverse public perception and anti-migrants sentiments distort national policy debates at normal times, and accentuate during times of economic stress and in times of crises. The international community has therefore a clear responsibility in developing common understanding and approaches in responding to social barriers, cultural hurdles, administrative and technical obstacles, and financial difficulties. In this era of globalization and universalisation of values, as we unite to take effective measures to make migration beneficial for all, we must agree on approaches that would allow us to work expeditiously and without confusion.

The recent middle-east crisis in particular the Libyan crisis have made it amply clear that in the event of an emergency, political or otherwise, it is the migrant workers, who become exposed to enormous risks and suffer the most. They face loss of employment and savings as well as challenging evacuation process. Many even perish. That is why at the Colombo Process Ministerial meeting in Dhaka in April 2011, Bangladesh took the lead in articulating the demand for an institutionalized approach and a proper emergency evacuation framework. In fact, the Dhaka Declaration entrusted IOM to work towards possible institutionalized responses(s). We are extremely happy that the IOM Council in December 2011 approved the creation of an emergency fund to reinforce IOM's operational and emergency response capacity. Bangladesh finds strong merit in such a financing mechanism to bridge the gap between the period when an emergency occurs and when contributions are received. As an expression of solidarity, I would like to announce a contribution of US\$ 1 million from Bangladesh to this fund. We are in the process of getting the allocations and hope to make actual contribution within weeks.

**Distinguished participants,**

Many countries are faced with slow-onset disasters and rapid-onset events and have become innocent victims of climate change. In Bangladesh, a huge segment of population faces displacement as a result of river erosion, sea level rise, salinity intrusion and other natural disasters. Studies have revealed that one metre rise in the sea level may displace about 30 million people in Bangladesh and make them migrants. This will not only compromise our development gains, but may have security implications as well. Given the importance and imminence, it would be wrong to leave out environmental migrants and climate induced displacement from the scope of any framework on protecting migrants in emergency and crisis.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished participants,**

Let me share with you some of my thoughts on how we could jointly address the challenge of assisting and protecting migrants caught in crisis. We

should approach the issue to develop a structured framework defining various facets, impacts, actors, consequences and remedies. I recognize two areas that deserve special attention.

The first is a thematic discourse to develop greater coherence among humanitarian and human rights regimes and to develop migration systems. The discourse could identify clear responsibilities for host countries and countries of origin, neighbouring countries, regional and international community, mandated UN and international organizations, NGOs and civil society actors. The framework should elaborate the operational aspects of assisting and protecting migrants in a situation created by political unrest, and other emergencies, evacuating and assisting them to explore new livelihood options including the possibility of return to host countries.

Here, timely and adequate action is often the only way to ensure that an emergency does not turn into a protracted crisis situation. I would like to touch upon a few areas for focused attention in pre-crisis, during-crisis and post-crisis periods:

**a. Flow of Information**

Credible information in a timely manner can help actors react appropriately and execute informed decisions and plans. It can prevent chaotic situations and possible panicking. We should also explore the possibility of forming a network to help host and sending countries, employers and employees and their relatives, international agencies, local authorities to share information and to take precautionary and protective measures.

**b. In situ-protection**

In- situ protection of migrants assumes greater significance where the size of migrant workers is such that repatriation or evacuation may not be organized immediately. Relocation within the country to safer places, conflict free zones, and safe heavens should form integral part of our approach. We ought to identify areas for capacity building and coordination among local authorities, international humanitarian agencies and Diplomatic Missions in bringing the migrant workers to secure places and protect them from ongoing unrest, violence and consequences of disasters.

**c. Evacuation**

Focus should remain on transition from in-situ protection to gradual and efficient assisted departure. We need greater coordination among IOM, ICRC, IFRC, UNHCR, IOM, OCHA and other mandated UN agencies as well as regional organizations and international development actors.

**d. Post-crisis measures**

Integration of returnees in countries of origin through providing supports for alternate livelihood options as well as return to jobs in the post-crisis period remain critical elements of a comprehensive approach. The global community should consider costs of non-action or inadequate actions. Inadequate response may allow temporary displacement into a protracted and ungovernable situation.

**e. Cost and funding**

We should explore ways to reduce the burden on migrant workers and the countries of origin by engaging recruiting agents and employers to assist the displaced migrants. In this, we may also see the merit of doing an advance risk assessment and pooling a fund from the contributions of migrant workers, recruiters, and sending and destination countries. The funds may work as assurance and may be accessed in times of emergency. Here, one can also examine whether we can institutionalise mandatory insurance against political unrest and other emergencies in the job contracts. We have to however be careful so that the additional cost is not transferred to the recruiting agents alone in the sending countries, and ultimately, to the potential migrant workers. We may carefully consider how the employers should share the cost of relocation for ensuring security and repatriation as well as how could payments, outstanding and current, be cleared expeditiously.

**Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,**

Since we are working presently on an ad-hoc mode, we need to discuss the scope and parameters of a structured global response within a comprehensive framework based on humanitarian and human rights principles. We should remain focused on a migrant-centric approach in developing any framework.

As response to conflicts and environmental disasters and climate induced displacements and migration would essentially be multi-dimensional and multi-layered, it would perhaps be difficult for a single organization to comprehensively

address all aspects of the challenge and evolve a global response mechanism. In this context, a lead agency may be identified to anchor the debate and develop a response framework. IOM, being the global migration agency, could take lead in close collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. IOM's proposed migration framework and the emergency fund could be at the core of initiating a global response.

Additionally, there is an imperative to obtain greater clarity on respective mandates of relevant stakeholders. This thematic discussion could be our second area of attention. We should not shy away from examining thematic challenges emanating from mandate overlaps and gaps. In all these, we must bear in mind that migrants should not only have equality of access and equality of treatment as human being, they should get access to all relevant affirmative actions initiated by host countries.

I thank you all.

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