

VIET NAM PRESENTATION
Workshop “Protecting migrants during times of crisis:
Immediate responses and suitable strategies”
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Your Excellency, Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration,

Distinguished Guests and Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, on behalf of the leader of the Consular Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, let me express my sincere thanks to His Excellency, Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration for the invitation and my appreciation to the Organizing Committee for the warm welcome. It is my belief that this workshop is a precious opportunity for all of us to share our experience and information on matters of our concern.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Along with Vietnam’s active and positive integration into the world economy, the number of Vietnamese nationals migrating abroad, especially migrant workers has risen dramatically. The outflow of Vietnamese citizens have made enormous contributions to solving employment pressure, increasing income, improving lives of the population, eliminating hunger and reducing poverty, stabilizing society, building a high-skilled workforce and creating momentums for the development of the country.

Sending Vietnamese labour to work abroad is the Government’s major policy and thus, protecting Vietnamese migrant workers is always a priority concern, especially at a time when our migrant workers face difficulties occurred in host countries by natural disasters, political unrest, war, etc. Up to now, around 500,000 Vietnamese nationals have been sent to more than 40 countries and territories, working in 30 different types of occupations ranging from low to highly skilled labourers and professionals.

Over the years, Vietnam’s policy on the protection of migrant workers have been tested through the evacuation of more than 17,000 Vietnamese workers in Iraq where the Gulf War broke out in 1990, the return of more than 400 Vietnamese workers in Lebanon where the civil war occurred in 2006 and especially, the recent operation to evacuate more than 10,000 Vietnamese workers in Libya where the political crisis arose in 2011. The successful outcomes of those operations were highly appreciated by the international community.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to be here today to share with you the operation to evacuate Vietnamese workers from Libya. I myself took part in this operation as the head of a working group in Tunisia to receive Vietnamese workers fleeing from Libya to Tunisia and other neighbouring countries.

Due to the time limit, I would like to make a brief presentation on the return of Vietnamese migrant workers as follows:

1. Forecast and situation assessment

In December 2010, when the situation in Tunisia and in the region started developing complicatedly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had reported to the Prime Minister and instructed the Vietnamese Embassies in Libya (concurrently in charge of Tunisia) and in Egypt to have a thorough grasp of the situation of Vietnamese nationals and to prepare a plan to evacuate them if the situation became worse. At that time, more than 10,000 Vietnamese nationals were working in Libya, mainly in the construction sector.

In February 2011, when the tensions escalated in Libya, driving the country to the brink of a civil war and a political crisis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs actively coordinated with relevant Ministries and agencies concerned to seek joint solutions and made recommendations to the Prime Minister on assigning specific tasks to each Ministries and agencies; the Vietnamese Embassies in Libya and neighbouring countries were instructed to closely follow the developments and actively protect Vietnamese nationals.

2. Coordination mechanism

- On February 24, 2011, the Prime Minister decided to establish “the Steering Committee on the Evacuation of Vietnamese workers in Libya”, headed by the Vice PM, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Pham Gia Khiem as chairman, Minister of Invalids and Social Affairs as vice-chairwoman, and other leaders from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of War Invalids and Social Affairs, Ministry of Transportation, Vietnam Airlines... as members.

- Set up 05 inter-agency working groups headed by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the participation of representatives of the above-said Ministries and agencies. These working groups were sent to Libya’s neighbouring countries, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Greece, Turkey and Malta to cooperate with Vietnamese embassies, local authorities and relevant international organizations such as IOM, UNHCR to facilitate the reception and return of Vietnamese workers fleeing from Libya in a safe and order manner.

- “The Frontline headquarters” was formed in Djerba, Tunisia to coordinate the evacuation activities. About 150 km away from the Tunisia-Libya border, Djerba was the main destination of Vietnamese workers abandoned by their employers on the way out of Libya. This place had an airport suitable for the landing and taking off of Boeing 777 and the working group suggested the Vietnam Airlines to choose this place as the focal point to set up an air bridge. 7 continuous and safe flights (plus 3 flights from Egypt, Turkey and Algeria) were conducted by Vietnam Airlines carrying Vietnamese workers back home. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs worked 24 hours a day to issue over 100 clearances to both Vietnamese and foreign aircrafts.

- The working groups in Egypt, Malta, Turkey and Greece closely cooperated with “The Frontline headquarters” in Tunisia and the Vietnamese Embassies to arrange shelters, provide food for Vietnamese workers; actively mobilized financial support of IOM and UNHCR for food, shelter and repatriation; and persuaded local authorities to grant entries to those who did not have passports and visas as well as to ensure their safety.

- The Vietnamese Embassy in Libya also quickly evacuated Vietnamese workers in dangerous areas, such as Benghazi and Tripoli, and requested the Libyan authorities to allow exit to those who did not have passports and exit visas. The Embassy gathered the

remaining workers still stranded in Libya to provide food, medicine and rapidly transported them out of the Libyan borders.

3. Outcomes

After 09 days of the evacuation operation, Viet Nam finally rescued and safely returned 10.082 workers from Libya, including 1.062 workers going back home by sea through the Benghazi port (Libya). The immediate instructions of the Steering Committee, the dynamic and effective collaboration among the working groups and the Vietnamese Embassies, the enthusiastic assistance of international organizations, especially the IOM as well as countries concerned are key factors for the success in the evacuation operation.

This operation is the biggest, the fastest and the most successful and effective ever, with no unfortunate mistakes.

4. Policy assisting Vietnamese workers returning from Libya

The Vietnamese Government truly understands numerous difficulties facing migrant workers fleeing the war. Accordingly, the Government instructed relevant Ministries, agencies and People's Committees to immediately take measures to assist the returning workers, such as:

- The returning workers could receive loans from the National Employment Fund for vocational training courses, jobs offer from enterprises as well as priority selection for working overseas in labour markets suitable for their skills if they wanted. Right after Vietnamese workers returned home, 16 enterprises expressed their readiness to provide over 16.000 vacancies in the construction sector with good salaries.

- Each worker was provided with at least VND 1 million (20 thousand VND is equivalent to 1 USD). Returnees working in Libya for less than 6 months would receive further aid, the support levels fell into the four categories: less than 1 month - VND 8 millions per worker; from more than one month to 2 months - VND 6 millions per worker; from more than 2 months to 4 months - VND 4 millions per worker; from more than 4 months to 6 months - VND 2 millions per worker. Of 10,193 returnees, 3,102 workers received further aid totally amounting to VND 18.6 billions (equivalent to 1 million USD).

Besides, returnees, especially those working in Libya for less than 6 months would have repayment extended if they still found it difficult to pay off bank debts.

In addition to the Government support policy, some provinces also initiated their own assistance programs, granting each returnee VND 1 million to 3 millions to help them stabilize their lives. Several workers were offered free job training and consultation at job centres.

Until now, just a small number of returnees have decided to work in Viet Nam while the majority has been looking for work abroad in such countries as the Republic of Korea, Kuwait etc., or return to Libya when the situation there is stable.

5. Lessons learned

The operation to evacuate Vietnamese workers from Libya ended quickly, safely, orderly and effectively, showing that the Vietnamese Government has always paid a great attention to citizens working, studying, and living abroad. Key factors for the success are as follows:

- Forecasting: This is the first factor in building active measures.
- Coordination among agencies: This is the determining factor in mobilizing all domestic resources to realize the Government's determination in this field.
- Actively mobilizing the immediate support from international organizations, relevant governments and people. This is the necessary factor. The Minister of War Invalids and Social Affairs, Vice Chairwoman of the Steering Committee has sent appreciation letters to the Director General of the IOM and leaders of some countries to express thanks and gratitude to their immediate and effective assistance, which contributed to the operation's success.

This is the first time ever, Viet Nam, for the most part, has actively made full use of its own resources in order to return a large number of citizens abroad safely and orderly. In comparison with the previous operations, this one shows great efforts of the Vietnamese Government in the protection of citizens abroad.

Thank you for your attention./.