



International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

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Summary record of the 119th meeting

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Chairperson: Mr. El Jamri

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 73 of the Convention

Initial report of Sri Lanka (CMW/C/LKA/1; CMW/C/LKA/Q/1, and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Sri Lanka took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Ruhunage** (Sri Lanka), introducing his country's initial report (CMW/C/LKA/1) on behalf of Dr. Rambukwella, Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare of Sri Lanka, said that since Sri Lanka had acceded to the International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 1996, successive Governments had remained steadfast in pursuit of the objectives of the Convention.

3. Sri Lanka was a significant labour supplier from the South Asian region and, in common with many Asian countries, had experienced considerable outward migration flows: the initial "brain drain" of professionally and technically qualified persons had been followed by a rapid increase in the annual rate of migration — currently 250,000 persons per annum — as skilled and unskilled job opportunities opened up in the Middle East. There were an estimated 1.8 million Sri Lankans in overseas employment, equal to 25 per cent of the employed population and constituting nearly 10 per cent of the total population.

4. The Government had introduced dramatic policy changes in 1997 on the basis of recommendations made by the Presidential Task Force on the Protection and Welfare of Migrant Workers and Their Family Members. The policy proposed by the task force targeted social protection and the empowerment of migrant workers, with special reference to female migrants, and recommended the appointment of labour welfare officers to Sri Lankan missions abroad, to attend to the welfare of migrant workers; the introduction of a unified service contract for the most vulnerable female domestic sector workers in order to minimize exploitation; compulsory training for female workers prior to departure; the introduction of a monitoring mechanism at the international airport to prevent illegal migration; and the creation of a Workers Welfare Fund for destitute Sri Lankan expatriate workers.

5. In 2007, the Government had set up the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare and in 2008 it had launched the landmark national policy on labour migration, developed with the assistance of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The policy — the first of its kind in the South Asian region — incorporated the provisions, concepts and best practices enshrined in different international instruments and was the result of a consultative process involving many stakeholders, including civil society and employment agencies. The three major objectives underpinning the policy were better governance and regulation of labour migration; effective protection and welfare services for migrant workers and their family members; and mobilizing the contributions of labour migration for social and development purposes. The Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare had established an inter-ministerial steering committee to draw up legislation that would bring the entire industry within the policy framework and an ILO advisory unit had been established in the Ministry to provide guidance on policy implementation.

6. The Ministry's policy initiatives included entering into bilateral memorandums of understanding and agreements with labour-receiving countries; introducing and implementing minimum wage standards for migrant workers; introducing host country-operated compulsory insurance schemes for female migrant workers; enhancing orientation and training programmes for migrant workers before departure; and introducing a pension scheme for migrant workers.

7. In order to address the challenges facing migrant workers and their families and the development challenges facing Sri Lanka, government policy was predicated on meeting three major objectives: better governance and regularization of migration; more effective social security protection measures for migrant workers and their family members; and an assessment of the development impact of migration and remittances.

8. In the mid-1990s, 65 per cent of migrant workers from Sri Lanka had been female, thanks to women's large presence in the domestic, service, garment and manufacturing sectors. However, as a result of careful implementation of current policies and the securing of more employment opportunities in male-dominated sectors, foreign employment had recently become more male-dominated. The change in the gender balance in foreign employment participation had welfare implications for the families of migrant workers.

9. The recent introduction of host country-operated insurance and social security schemes for the most vulnerable female workers was in keeping with the objectives of the Convention on Migrant Workers. Social security schemes had been introduced for Sri Lankans in Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, their cost being borne by the foreign employer. Compensation for deaths, disabilities, medical assistance, repatriation and legal assistance were covered by the schemes.

10. Bilateral memorandums of understanding and agreements had been signed with the Governments of Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya; similar agreements with the Governments of Kuwait, Lebanon and Oman, where large numbers of Sri Lankan workers were employed, were in the pipeline. As a result of the memorandums of understanding with Bahrain and Qatar, the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment enjoyed access to the online visa information of migrant workers permitted to enter those countries. That system had paved the way for monitoring the activities of illegal recruiters involved in human trafficking, who used forged visas and other illegal means to conduct their activities.

11. Curbing human trafficking was an important component of good governance of labour migration. In 2006, the Sri Lankan Parliament had passed the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 16, which criminalized the trafficking of women in compliance with the standards of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In 2005, Sri Lanka had ratified the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment had established a monitoring unit at the country's international airport in 1997, in order to control illegal migration and human trafficking. Recent amendments to the Foreign Employment Act would also have a positive impact on curbing human trafficking. It was also proposed to set up an anti-trafficking detection centre at Sri Lanka's international airport under the control of the Department of Immigration and Emigration in order to apprehend possible human traffickers, identify their victims and combat human smuggling. An International Organization for Migration (IOM) project funded by the United States Government to train law enforcement officers in Sri Lanka on the prevention of human trafficking had been carried out over the last two years.

12. The Government of Sri Lanka had entered into a readmission agreement with the European Union in 2004 to assist stranded and trafficked Sri Lankans to return home; the relevant protocol agreements with European Union countries were currently under preparation.

13. In 2003, the Government of Sri Lanka, with IOM assistance, had initiated the Colombo Process, a regional dialogue on cooperation and policy, with a view to upgrading migration policies to include development objectives and minimizing the negative impacts

of labour migration. Follow-up seminars had been conducted in the Philippines, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. It was significant that the last meeting, held in January 2008 in the United Arab Emirates, had been attended by both labour-sending and labour-receiving countries, which had undertaken to work together for the betterment of migrant workers.

14. The Global Forum on Migration and Development continued to draw the attention of the international community to contemporary labour migration issues and provided an impetus for framing the necessary policy changes through regional consultative processes.

15. By recently amending its foreign employment law, the Government of Sri Lanka had taken a further step to safeguard the rights of migrant workers and curb exploitation and abuses. The amended law increased the punishments for wrongdoers and illegal recruiters and safeguarded workers from excessive recruitment fees, and would further strengthen the safe and decent work policy followed by his Ministry.

16. With the commencement of various infrastructure development programmes and an increase in the number of foreign investment-led industries, there had been an upward trend in the inflow of foreign workers to Sri Lanka, although migration inflows were insignificant when compared with the outflow of migrants in recent years. Foreign migrant workers in the country had free access to health-care facilities and education for their children.

17. The Government of Sri Lanka believed that the individual earnings of migrant workers, which provided the highest net foreign-exchange earnings, must be made more development- and less consumption-oriented. Therefore, his Ministry's reintegration programme for returnees provided opportunities for them to utilize their newly acquired skills for the purpose of national development. The Government was responsible for making the migration flow a dignified and protected sector, in keeping with the provisions of the Convention on Migrant Workers.

18. In conclusion, the contribution of migrant workers to the national economies of receiving countries needed to be recognized and given appropriate consideration by the relevant international bodies, and the need for policies that took account of the rights of migrant workers should be impressed on receiving countries. It was of vital importance that labour-receiving countries in the Middle East should accede to the relevant United Nations and ILO instruments if the rights of migrant workers were to be further promoted and protected at the national and international levels.

19. **Mr. Nanayakkara** (Sri Lanka), illustrating his remarks with slides, said that the national policy on labour migration had been adopted to develop the foreign employment industry, to protect and promote migrant workers and to recognize their contribution to the national economy. The policy's three objectives, as outlined by Mr. Ruhunage, were examined by working groups which submitted their findings to a steering committee. The working groups included representatives of the Government, civil society and non-governmental organizations. The steering committee was headed by the relevant minister and included representatives of trade unions, academia and recruitment agencies.

20. With regard to the policy objective of good governance, institutional, legislative and regulatory frameworks had been examined. The action plan for the institutional framework covered identifying the roles of all agencies and institutions; establishing an advisory committee; strengthening the role of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment; and developing the recruitment process. Remedial actions had been devised to curb the malpractices of recruitment agencies, set a clear mandate for recruitment agents, provide a code of ethics for recruitment agents and apply uniform procedures at Sri Lanka missions in labour-receiving countries. Good governance of the migration process included amending legislation to comply with international standards on the protection, promotion and welfare of migrant workers. The action plan for the regulatory framework aimed to give all citizens

opportunities for skills development and to promote overseas employment opportunities through memorandums of understanding and bilateral agreements. Model contracts were to be developed and complaints mechanisms would be introduced or strengthened.

21. With regard to the policy objective of protecting and empowering migrant workers and their families, the action plan covered the introduction of educational qualifications and age limits, strengthening pre-departure training programmes and implementing awareness programmes. Proper recruitment systems were to be instituted and the labour sections of missions in destination countries were to be strengthened. Special services for returning migrant workers would include welcome programmes, safe transport to their home town and duty-free allowances. Mechanisms would be set up to help them find local employment, develop their entrepreneurial skills and offer them guidance on investment opportunities. Measures had also been proposed for the protection and welfare of the children of migrant workers.

22. With regard to the policy objective of enhancing the contribution of migration to development, the action plan for the promotion and development of employment opportunities included the preparation of a comprehensive market development plan and surveys to identify niche markets. Bilateral agreements would be drawn up and the duties and responsibilities of labour welfare officers and counsellors redefined. The promotion of skilled worker migration would be accomplished by developing a competitive workforce, implementing private-public partnership programmes and providing language courses. As for the role of migrant worker remittances in development, the plan was to identify strategies that would raise the volume of remittances and reduce the transfer costs; maximize migrant savings and encourage investment; and carry out a cost-benefit analysis of labour migration.

23. The Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare had taken a number of initiatives to implement the policy on labour migration, including the establishment of a special unit for that purpose within the Ministry; the preparation, with the assistance of IOM, of a national plan of action; the establishment of an advisory committee and an inter-agency task force; and the introduction of a monitoring and evaluation system.

24. **Mr. Brillantes** (Country Rapporteur) commended the delegation for its comprehensive and well-prepared presentation, but observed that it had focused too closely on policy and had not provided enough specific examples of how Sri Lanka had given effect to the Convention. He welcomed the Government's efforts to provide protection and assistance to migrant workers abroad through the presence of labour welfare officers in consulates. He asked how many such officers there were and in which countries they had been deployed. In particular, he wished to know whether any such officers were present in the countries of the Middle East, such as Bahrain, where there were large numbers of Sri Lankan migrant workers. He also welcomed the introduction of measures to authenticate the employment contracts of prospective migrant workers departing from Sri Lanka and asked how many of the 1.7 million Sri Lankan migrant workers held such authenticated contracts and whether the latter were collective or individual in nature.

25. The establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare was a decisive step towards progress in implementing the Convention, and he would appreciate more details on its work and the estimated time frame in which that work was expected to bear fruit. He welcomed the fact that Sri Lanka had been able to increase significantly the ratio of male to female Sri Lankan migrant workers, so that women no longer represented the overwhelming majority of such migrants. He would be interested to know how the Government had achieved that result.

26. With regard to repatriation assistance for migrant workers, he asked how many cases had been handled solely by the Sri Lankan Government and how many with the assistance

of IOM. He also requested additional information on what forms of legal assistance had been provided to migrant workers, what fees were charged for such services and whether there were instances in which legal assistance was provided free of charge. He wondered whether the Government had plans to conclude a memorandum of understanding or a bilateral agreement with Bahrain concerning the protection of the rights of Sri Lankan migrants. He welcomed the State party's efforts to combat trafficking in persons, the introduction of legislation on the illegal recruitment of workers and the programme for the reintegration of returning migrants. He would appreciate more specific information in those areas. Overall, Sri Lanka had taken some very innovative courses of action to assist and protect migrant workers, but it would be helpful if it could provide more specific information as to the time frames in which results were expected and the number of migrant workers who would be helped.

27. He asked whether the Sri Lankan Government would consider making its bilateral agreements or memorandums of understanding concerning migrant workers available to the Committee, civil society organizations and the general public. He also asked whether the Government had any intention of concluding such an agreement with Israel and requested clarification on readmission agreements and their impact on refugees and asylum-seekers in Sri Lanka.

28. In connection with voting in Sri Lankan elections by Sri Lankan nationals who had migrated abroad, he requested detailed information on the steps taken to ensure that migrants were able to retain their voting rights. He also requested more details on the Government insurance and pension schemes set up for Sri Lankan migrant workers, including the number of workers who benefited from such schemes and how the Government ensured that beneficiaries were informed of their rights on their return to Sri Lanka.

29. He would appreciate clarification of the role played by civil society organizations in the preparation of Sri Lanka's initial report. He asked what measures had been taken to address the needs of children affected by migration. He requested data and statistics on irregular migration, and wondered whether there were any new countries of destination for Sri Lankan migrants.

30. The Committee would appreciate additional information on how Sri Lanka's consulates guaranteed protection to Sri Lankan migrant workers abroad, including their operating procedures and how they interacted with receiving States in order to ensure the protection of Sri Lankan migrant workers.

31. Lastly, he asked what steps Sri Lanka had taken to bring its domestic legislation into full conformity with the Convention: it would be useful to identify which laws needed to be amended and which had already been amended. He would also like to know how Sri Lanka informed the general public in Sri Lanka and the millions of Sri Lankan migrant workers living abroad about the provisions of the Convention.

32. **Mr. Sevim** said that the Committee's concerns centred on two different groups of migrants — Sri Lankan migrants living abroad and foreign migrants living in Sri Lanka — and the steps being taken by the Sri Lankan Government to protect their rights. Although the proportion of women among Sri Lankan migrant workers had fallen, special attention still needed to be paid to the rights of female migrant workers, most of whom worked in the Middle East or Gulf countries. In that respect, bilateral agreements with receiving countries were crucial. Consequently, he would appreciate receiving more detailed information on social security agreements concluded with those countries, particularly with regard to the pension and health-care benefits of female Sri Lankan migrant workers in the Middle East and those of their children or dependants living in Sri Lanka. He asked whether Sri Lankan

migrants who worked for short periods abroad and accumulated pensions in foreign countries were able to obtain their pension benefits from those countries.

33. He invited the delegation to provide a fuller account of the consular services offered by the Sri Lankan Government and the extent to which those services protected the rights of Sri Lankan nationals. It was unclear what rank had been given to the Convention in the State party's domestic law: in particular, could the Convention be invoked directly in Sri Lankan courts? He would appreciate further information on the role played by NGOs in assisting migrant workers in Sri Lanka. It was difficult to understand how the Convention could be promoted and publicized if it had not yet been translated into the national language.

34. He would appreciate receiving more complete information in response to several questions contained in the list of issues (CMW/C/LKA/Q/1), including question 7 regarding the impact of migration on families and specifically on children in the State party. With regard to the State party's reply to question 8, he asked for clarification of the rights guaranteed under article 14 of the Constitution that were restricted to citizens. The State party's reply to question 9, concerning effective remedies for migrant workers and members of their families whose rights had been violated, was related to the State party's reply to question 17: the fact that the Constitution did not provide for the right of migrant workers to join and form associations and trade unions was not in conformity with article 40 of the Convention. The State party's reply to question 10, in which it stated that expulsion orders were final and could not be challenged in any court, also revealed a lack of conformity with the Convention. As to question 21, he asked which categories of foreign workers were denied residence visas to have their spouse and dependants live with them in Sri Lanka. With reference to question 24, he requested additional information on whether provisions concerning procedural guarantees had been included in readmission agreements concluded by Sri Lanka with labour-receiving countries, and if so, what the specific content was of such provisions.

35. **Mr. Taghizade** asked for more detailed information on training programmes for departing Sri Lankan migrant workers in the language, culture and skills they required in destination countries. Given the large numbers of Sri Lankan migrant workers concerned, he imagined that such training programmes necessitated considerable financial and human resources. In particular he would like to know what emphasis was given to language programmes.

36. According to paragraph 5 of the report (CMW/C/LKA/1), there had been a decline in poverty in Sri Lanka since 2002. He enquired what the reasons were for the decline, and whether the poverty in question was absolute or relative. He was somewhat confused by the statistics provided in paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report concerning trends in the proportion of Sri Lankan men versus women working overseas and requested clarification in that connection.

37. **Ms. Cubias Medina** expressed concern about the situation of illegal migrants in Sri Lanka, particularly in the light of the statistics relating to illegal migration and human smuggling provided in the written replies to the list of issues (CMW/C/LKA/Q/1/Add.1). She asked whether illegal migration was classified as a criminal offence in Sri Lanka, and what mechanisms existed to ensure protection for the victims of trafficking as well as the prosecution of their traffickers. For example, were there any shelters in Sri Lanka specifically for the victims of trafficking?

38. She enquired whether the Sri Lankan Government had conducted any studies into the social impact, especially on children, of the large number of Sri Lankan women working overseas. Noting that Sri Lankan citizens working abroad were currently unable to exercise their right to vote, she asked what steps were being taken to remedy that situation.

Mention had been made of “immunity” enjoyed by peace officers in connection with amendments made to Sri Lankan labour law. She requested further clarification on that subject.

39. **Ms. Poussi** said that while the report had many positive aspects, it contained scant information on how the legislative and other measures introduced by the Government actually benefited migrant workers. She enquired whether the Parliament of Sri Lanka was considering ratifying the ILO Convention concerning Migration for Employment (No. 97) and Convention concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers (No. 143), and what obstacles there might be to their ratification. She also asked whether pre-employment orientation programmes organized by the Sri Lankan authorities were open to both men and women.

40. Paragraph 42 (e) of the report referred to safe houses set up to provide shelter for migrant workers in need of protection. She requested more information on such facilities, including their usual location, the criteria for admission to them and the maximum length of stay there. She asked whether the welfare fund for migrant workers was already operational and how exactly it worked. Referring to the measures adopted to combat the illegal recruitment of migrant workers, she asked for detailed information on the type of measures involved and whether they had proved effective.

41. Although there were not many foreigners working in Sri Lanka, she would like to know what arrangements were in place to ensure their right to participate in public affairs and to protect their social security rights. For example, were they obliged to stay in Sri Lanka in order to draw their retirement pension? Were they subject to restrictions on the repatriation of funds? In view of the large number of Sri Lankan citizens working abroad, she asked what efforts the Government was making to disseminate information on the Convention and encourage its ratification in other States.

42. **Mr. El-Borai** said that there were two important issues on which the delegation should provide more detailed information: the role of diplomatic missions and consulates in protecting the rights of Sri Lankan migrant workers; and the social security rights of repatriated workers. He would also like to know more about the outcome of the recent meeting in the United Arab Emirates concerning migrant workers, at which both host countries and countries of origin had been represented. Various references had been made to recent amendments to Sri Lankan labour law affecting migrant workers; the details of those amendments should be clearly spelled out.

43. It was well known that despite the Sri Lankan Government’s efforts to provide guidance and training for its citizens who planned to work overseas, there were more Sri Lankan citizens working illegally than legally in the Gulf States. He invited the delegation to explain the reasons for that phenomenon.

44. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether the readmission agreement between the European Union and Sri Lanka, which had entered into force in 2005, was working effectively. He enquired what readmission arrangements were made in the case of States with which Sri Lanka had not signed agreements. He asked what efforts the Sri Lankan Government made to promote the Convention on Migrant Workers in the main countries of destination for Sri Lankan migrant workers, particularly in those States with a poor human rights record. Lastly, had the Colombo Process had a favourable impact on Sri Lankan policy towards migrant workers?

The meeting was suspended at 4.45 p.m. and resumed at 5.15 p.m.

45. **Mr. Jauhar** (Sri Lanka), replying to the Committee’s questions, provided additional information on labour welfare officers who served in diplomatic missions in major destination countries, including the Gulf States, and looked after the interests of migrant

workers there. In States such as Bahrain and Cyprus where there was no permanent diplomatic mission, migrant workers could turn to honorary consuls for assistance. A diplomatic mission would shortly be opened in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya with staff responsible for migrant workers' welfare. New destination countries for Sri Lankan migrant workers included Japan, the Russian Federation and Romania.

46. Migrant workers returning to Sri Lanka were entitled to the same social security benefits as other Sri Lankan citizens. The current Government implemented social welfare schemes for citizens below the poverty line. He pointed out that Sri Lanka had one of the highest literacy rates in South Asia and one of the reasons for that was that education and health care were provided free of charge. Pupils were given free books and two free school uniforms a year. School attendance was compulsory and parents were held accountable if their children did not attend. The Government ran various social welfare programmes; for example, it helped those living below the poverty line to meet their living expenses. Returning migrants had the same rights as those enjoyed by other citizens.

47. With the support of IOM, the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment was in the process of translating the conventions to which Sri Lanka was a party. During high-level visits to the countries receiving Sri Lankan migrant workers, the Sri Lankan delegations had discussed the benefits to be gained by both sides by signing the relevant international conventions. In 2008, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs had visited several receiving countries to speak with his counterparts on issues relating to migrant workers. Furthermore, representatives of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment carried out regular visits to receiving countries to meet Sri Lankan migrant workers and discuss any problems they might be encountering. Those problems were subsequently raised with embassy officials and, to the extent possible, an immediate solution was sought.

48. **Mr. Ruhunage** (Sri Lanka) said that safe houses had been set up in receiving countries, mostly on embassy premises. They provided safe accommodation, guidance and support in the settlement of disputes for about 500 persons at any one time. Apart from the safe house in Malaysia, all others admitted only female migrant workers. Labour welfare officers were responsible for investigating cases and assessing whether those involved needed to be admitted to a safe house. The length of stay was not restricted and could range from a few days to over a year. Where appropriate, the embassy would take legal action on behalf of migrant workers. Legal officers who were qualified to work in the countries concerned had been appointed at many embassies. The maintenance costs of those staying in the safe houses were covered by the welfare fund for migrant workers. That welfare fund was financed from the fees levied on foreign employers when an employment contract was signed.

49. It was compulsory for migrant workers to register with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment prior to their departure and there was a small fee for doing so. The Bureau offered insurance coverage to all migrant workers, who were informed of the benefits of the scheme at training centres. The benefits were also listed on the certificate received by migrant workers when they registered. In 2008, 3,091 persons had received benefits under the scheme. Some host country-operated insurance schemes had been established, for example, in Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. A scheme had been finalized and would soon be implemented in Saudi Arabia. Those schemes were funded by the host country employers. Millions of Sri Lankan rupees had been paid out in benefits under those schemes.

50. **Ms. Mallikaratchy** (Sri Lanka) said that the Colombo Process had been initiated in 2003 to promote dialogue on overseas employment practices. Although the Process had begun as a forum for discussion between labour-sending countries, it had since expanded to include the participation of receiving countries and international observers, including observers from the European Commission. The recent Abu Dhabi Dialogue, hosted by the

Government of the United Arab Emirates, had confirmed that change of direction and had resulted in the Abu Dhabi Declaration of Asian Countries of Origin and Destination, as well as a plan of action. IOM had undertaken a study into the impact of the economic crisis on migrant workers from the Colombo Process countries and the results would be shared among the member countries in October 2009.

51. **Mr. Ruhunage** (Sri Lanka) said that, as a result of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, some receiving countries were considering changing their sponsor-based visa systems, which violated certain migrant workers' rights.

52. A domestic pension scheme for migrant workers had been introduced and was intended to benefit those who did not already benefit from pension schemes in their destination countries. Migrant workers could make contributions to the scheme and claim a monthly allowance after they reached retirement age. The amount they received per month would depend on the contributions they had made. Migrant workers who returned to Sri Lanka could continue to contribute to the scheme, but were not entitled to join any other government pension scheme. Migrant workers could join the scheme by completing a form available when they registered prior to departure. About 5,000 migrant workers were enrolled in the scheme and it was hoped that the number would increase as more migrant workers became aware of the benefits. The scheme was the first in the region for migrant workers.

53. **Mr. Jauhar** (Sri Lanka) said that Sri Lankans who had been abroad could purchase goods duty-free on their return. With regard to the Government's efforts to protect Sri Lankans overseas, in 2008, a Sri Lankan delegation had gone to Kuwait to discuss the situation of undocumented Sri Lankan workers, who were ultimately permitted to return to Sri Lanka. IOM had provided assistance in that repatriation programme.

54. **Mr. Taghizade** asked what kind of sanctions could be imposed on parents whose children did not attend school, how they were implemented and how often the Government had applied such sanctions. Were those sanctions also applied when the children of migrant workers in Sri Lanka did not attend school?

55. **Ms. Cubias Medina** asked how the provisions of the Convention were reflected in the bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding on employment that the Government of Sri Lanka had signed, as the States parties to the Convention were responsible for promoting the Convention and encouraging other countries to ratify it.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.