

Ministerial Consultation on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin and Destination in Asia “Abu Dhabi Dialogue”

Abu Dhabi, 21-22 January 2008

Contractual Labour Mobility in Asia: Key Partnerships for Development between Countries of Origin and Destination

Abu Dhabi Declaration of Asian Countries of Origin and Destination

The Ministers of Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam and Yemen having come together in Abu Dhabi on 21 and 22 January 2008 to constitute the Ministerial Consultation on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin and Destination in Asia, referred to as the Abu Dhabi Dialogue¹, adopted the following considerations and recommendations:

I. CONSIDERATIONS

I.1 Growing temporary and circular labour mobility in Asia is prompting countries of origin and destination to re-examine a number of long-held assumptions about contractual labour mobility with a view towards advancing their respective developmental interests through increased collaboration and partnership.

I.2 When properly managed, temporary contractual labour mobility will benefit both countries of origin and destination as well as improve the well-being of temporary contractual workers. Labour mobility can be an important instrument for the development of economies as well as human resources. The UN General Assembly High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in New York in September 2006, and the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Brussels in July 2007, highlighted the relationships between international mobility, poverty alleviation and development.

I.3 The potential of temporary contractual labour mobility in fostering development is not a new concept in Asia. For a number of decades now, many Asian countries have looked to opportunities available in the regional labour market to satisfy their employment and human resource needs. However, what is new today is the recognition that we are living in a world that is more mobile than ever before; a world with greater integration of economies, labour forces and societies; and one which is experiencing rapid and deep changes, notably due to technological advances, demographic shifts and environmental degradation.

¹ The Abu Dhabi Dialogue is a dialogue between the 11 Colombo Process countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), and 9 other Asian countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and Yemen). This Dialogue therefore takes place amongst governments from several geographical sub regions in Asia, addressed in this document under the generic term "Asia". These are Western Asia (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen), Southern Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), Eastern Asia (China), and South-Eastern Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam).

I.4 Against this backdrop, ten labour countries of origin from South and Southeast Asia established in 2003 a regional dialogue, known today as the “Colombo Process.” The first meeting in Colombo was followed by a second in Manila in September 2004, and a third in Bali in September 2005. During the Bali meeting, Afghanistan joined as the 11th member and, for the first time, countries of destination attended as observers. It was also at the Bali meeting that the membership agreed to formally engage in a dialogue with countries of destination, both Asian and European. The Bali Ministerial represented a qualitative leap in the emerging dialogue between Asian countries of origin and destination and it was recognized there that the term “expatriate and contractual labour” was an accurate description of labour flows to GCC countries.

I.5 The hosting and funding by the Government of the United Arab Emirates of the Ministerial Consultation between the Colombo Process countries and Asian destination countries is an important expression of the interstate collaboration fostered in this dialogue since its very inception.

I.6 The Abu Dhabi meeting highlighted that, in the context of the global economy, there is increasing competition to boost economic growth through labour mobility at all skill levels. In this connection the Ministers consider that best economic and social outcomes are achieved through the provision to all workers of good living and working conditions, their protection including through promotion and implementation of transparent policies and practices including for recruitment and employment according to the national laws and regulations of countries of origin and destination and facilitating remittances, and the development of a framework for multilateral cooperation to leverage the benefits of temporary contractual labour mobility.

I.7 The Abu Dhabi meeting recognized the joint responsibility of countries of origin and destination to enforce compliance by recruitment agencies and other parties engaged in the recruitment process with the requirements of national laws and regulations pertaining to the employment of temporary contractual labour, thus providing further protection to workers.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

II.1 Based on the above mentioned considerations, and in light of the constructive dialogue that took place in Abu Dhabi, the participating States have decided to launch a new collaborative approach to address temporary labour mobility and maximize its benefits for development. They have identified the following key partnerships between Asian countries of origin and destination through which they wish to foster information sharing, promote capacity building, technical cooperation and interstate cooperation.

Partnership 1: Enhancing knowledge in the areas of: labour market trends, skills profiles, temporary contractual workers and remittances policies and flows and their interplay with development in the region

Partnership 2: Building capacity for effective matching of labour demand and supply

Partnership 3: Preventing illegal recruitment practices and promoting welfare and protection measures for contractual workers, supportive of their well-being and preventing their exploitation at origin and destination

Partnership 4: Developing a framework for a comprehensive approach to managing the entire cycle of temporary contractual mobility that fosters the mutual interests of countries of origin and destination

II.2 These partnerships are based on the mutual interests of labour origin and destination countries, with a particular focus on development. They are action-oriented and, in addition to governments, will seek to engage other relevant stakeholders for the implementation of initiatives which will take this partnership forward in a spirit of international dialogue and cooperation.

II.3 The meeting calls on the countries of origin and destination to continue their dialogue to identify practical outcomes to the partnerships enunciated in this declaration with support of IOM.

II.4 The next Abu Dhabi Dialogue Ministerial Consultation will be held in in 2010 with support from IOM.

II.5 The meeting welcomes the call by His Highness Sheikh Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince of Bahrain, Chairman of the Economic Development Board, at the 96th Session of the International Labour Conference, to launch a Social Dialogue Summit to address labour issues with the participation of countries of origin and destination in order to reach effective decisions in the light of the outcome of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue and other pertinent meetings that were held recently.

The Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Government of the United Arab Emirates for chairing this Ministerial Consultation and the hospitality provided to all participants, as well as to IOM for its efficient support as Secretariat of the Colombo Process and of this first meeting of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue.

Abu Dhabi, 22 January 2008