

Let us ensure the job security of the migrant workers who are affected by the economic recession.

Let us celebrate the International Migrants' Day that falls on the 18th December 2022.

Today we celebrate the 23rd International Migrants' Day of the migrant workers, which was declared by the United Nations Organisation in the year 2000. The International Migrants' Day is celebrated every year in order to salute the migrant workers for the worthy contribution they make to the national economy. The United Nations emphasizes that the rights of the migrant workers should be treated as human rights. Having recognized that emphasis of the United Nations, the member countries of the United Nations have ratified the International Convention on the rights of the Migrant Workers and their families and enforced it internationally. Sri Lanka too has ratified this convention thus ensuring that it recognizes the rights of the migrant workers enshrined in the convention, locally. However it must be emphasized that all the rights recognized by the convention have not been enforced locally and that legal provisions have not been promulgated to cover the Sri Lankan migrant workers under some provisions of the Convention. While reiterating that the responsibilities that are intertwined with the rights are in the hands of all citizens, it must be pointed out that citizens will not have the confidence and strength to fulfil those responsibilities without their rights being ensured.

The remittances sent in by the migrant workers inject significant vigour to the economic development of Sri Lanka. Migrant worker remittances stood at approximately 7 Billion U.S.Dollars in the previous years. Foreign Employment sector is one of the most affected sectors in the post Covid-19 context and due to the ensuing economic turmoil. Employment opportunities of the number of migrant workers who were employed in the foreign employment sector which provided the highest contribution to the Sri Lankan economy through the service sector, were lost instantly or within a very short period of time thus leaving the migrant workers as well as their families in the lurch. Given the current economic breakdown of the country, they have no certainty or security over their jobs. The government must consider it a high priority to ensure the vocational safety of the migrant workers as it will help resuscitate the damaged economy.

As much As in the year 2020/2021 in 2022, too we have to celebrate the International Migrants' Day in a context where their lives are in jeopardy owing to the economic depression experienced by the country. Loss of employment to the migrant workers when

the country's economy needs Oxygen is a tragedy for both the country and the migrant workers.

At present the government of Sri Lanka is engaged in negotiations to send the Sri Lankan workers abroad for employment. We emphasise that the onus is on the government to send them for better employment by devising methods through which they can obtain proficiency certificates after gaining the required skills and competencies.

The migrant women and young people opted to migrate through Visit Visas as they wanted to find a way out of the abject poverty they were suffering from. However, quite contrary to their expectations, they had to face various predicaments including sexual harassment in the destination countries as was reported by the media. These incidents snowball and become tragic as it is only a dream to build an economy that can barely sustain their lives in a gruesome economy.

We wish to remind the government that it is its responsibility to protect the human rights of the migrant workers even though they migrate for employment through illegal means. There must be a mechanism to be accountable for their protection when they are abroad. What is of significance is that it is this country that benefits out of their earnings.

Moreover, the government has to launch a broad programme to enable migrant workers to get better jobs. We also wish to emphasise that it is a prime responsibility of the government to establish a pension scheme or a social protection system for the migrant workers who earn foreign exchange for the country. It is also sad to note that attention of the government is yet to be paid to ensuring the protection of the family members of the migrant workers.

We wish to emphasise the responsibility that lies in the government and all of us in general to lay the foundation for the migrant workers to engage in livelihoods of their choice by saving them from many hardships they still undergo in foreign countries and protecting their rights. We urge the relevant authorities of the government to take serious note of the recommendations listed below and take steps to implement them at this moment of commemoration of the International Migrant's Day.

1 A National Advisory Committee consisting of high officials in the state machinery including all Ministries and Departments relating to the field of Foreign Employment should be appointed and the current plight of the migrant workers and their families should be monitored.

2 A methodology should be prepared to bring back the workers who are still stranded in the foreign countries back to Sri Lanka.

3 Legally binding bilateral agreements should be entered into with the relevant countries to enable migrant workers to obtain specific jobs in accordance with the skills they have acquired.

4 A suitable programme should be implemented forthwith to reintegrate the women workers who are in a hapless situation owing to being unable to migrate, into the society and build their physical and mental situation.

5 The proposal for a pension scheme for migrant workers that was approved by the Budget 2020 should be implemented expeditiously.

6 The relevant legal reforms required to give effect to the rights granted by the conventions on migrant workers should be introduced.

7 Methods to create the Digital platform for the Migrant Service, expedite its usage and ensure the safety of the data contained therein, should be established.

8 Creating a support network for entrepreneur development.

9 National and Divisional committees comprising of voluntary organisations, Women's organisations, Human Rights organisations, Trade Unions and migrant workers with a representation of public officials from the grassroots should be established forthwith in order to protect the future of the migrant workers and their families. The direct involvement of those committees should be invited to monitor and ensure the proper implementation of state policies, legal provisions and the institutional procedures designed to ensure and promote the rights of the migrant workers and their family members.

Women and Media Collective –(WMC)

Lawyers Beyond Borders- Sri Lanka – (LLB)

National Workers Congress – (NWC)

Migrant Service Center- (MSC)

Action Network for Migrant Workers –(ACTFORM)

