



GFMD PREPARATORY MEETING REPORT

16 June 2010

**BRAC Centre Inn
Dhaka, Bangladesh**



IOM International Organization for Migration

OPENING SESSION

A preparatory meeting for the fourth Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) meeting in Mexico was organized by IOM and was attended by a wide variety of participants from the civil society and the government. Dr. Zafar Ahmed Khan, Secretary, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) attended as Chief Guest, and Mr. Zulfiquir Rahman, Director General, UN, HR and MEA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) attended as Special Guest.

Opening remarks were provided by Ms. Rabab Fatima, Regional Representative for South Asia, International Organization for Migration. Ms. Fatima stated that the fourth GFMD meeting is important for Bangladesh for two main reasons – firstly, Bangladesh will be attending as the chair of the Colombo Process, which will take place in October and secondly, Bangladesh with the United Kingdom will be co-chairing the round table on Climate Change, Development and Migration at the GFMD. She further highlighted the growing importance of the environment, climate change and migration nexus, both nationally and globally, and the leading role that Bangladesh can play with regards to bringing to the fore the national concerns regarding the effects of climate change. In closing, Ms. Rabab Fatima suggested to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to create a working group which will focus on facilitating the preparation of a position paper with consolidated input from both the civil societies and the government representatives.

Following Ms. Fatima's welcome comments, Mr. Zulfiquir Rahman, Director General, UN, HR and MEA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave his opening statement. Mr. Rahman underscored the importance of coordinated and well prepared participation from Bangladesh, and thanked IOM in this regard for organizing these preparatory meetings leading up to the GFMD. He highlighted that while some deride the GFMD for being non-binding, it is this that actually allows the government officials to converse freely regarding a wide range of policy issues without being quoted or being bound by any agreement. However, he agreed that there needs to be some form of a follow up and monitoring mechanism, whereby it can be evaluated to what extent the recommendations are implemented and are effective. Mr. Rahman stressed that the negative effects of migration have been receiving a lot of attention, and the situations of exploitation do not only exist in the countries of destination but are also very much present in Bangladesh, and plague the migrants through out the migration process. Since it is common knowledge that migration can benefit both the countries of origin and destination, he stressed the need for proactive policies that can create such win-win situations, not only for the countries but also for the migrants themselves.

As the Chief Guest, Dr. Zafar Ahmed Khan, Secretary, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment stated that Bangladesh is not only highly dependent on remittances sent by migrant workers, but also greatly benefit from them. He stressed that the reduction of the cost of migration posed a great challenge for the Government, and that MoEWOE is making concerted efforts to address the issue. Dr. Khan urged the civil society to take an active role at the GFMD and present a unified voice at the Civil Society Days.

Following the introductory statements, IOM made a presentation on Positioning and Preparing for the 4th GFMD, which set the tone for the rest of the meeting. The presentation provided a detailed overview of the GFMD, the achievements up to date and the follow up actions of the Athens meeting in 2009. It further highlighted the preparations needed to be taken by Bangladesh, and the potential areas where Bangladesh can play a leading role.

WORKING SESSION

Two more presentations were made by civil society partners, first one being by Mr. Aminul Islam, Project Coordinator, BRAC who shared the civil society's experiences from the last GFMD meeting in Athens and highlighted the following:

- The civil society participants from Bangladesh were unable to comprehensively articulate a unified and sensible position, which consequently translated to limited impact;
- There was limited time for consultations between the civil society and the government representatives and limited time for discussions after the presentations/speeches in the GFMD sessions;
- The civil society participation was very narrowly focused, and did not represent the depth of expertise available in the country;
- Civil Society Days agenda failed to reflect linkages between migrants rights and development.
- Individual nature of submission procedure for attending the meeting restricts/hampers better coordination among civil society members in attending parallel sessions.
- The Civil Society Days should be used as a forum to advocate for migrants' rights, ratification of conventions such as the migrant workers' convention etc. and subsequently requires a coordinated presence from the civil societies.

Mr. Islam stressed the need for coordinated and coherent civil society participation, and the possibility of involving civil society partners in the governmental process for better representation of Bangladesh and greater impact at the GFMD.

Following Mr. Islam's experience sharing, Mr. Syed Saiful Hoque, Chairman, WARBE (also member of the International Advisory Committee, GFMD) gave his presentation which included the following:

- Outlined the detailed agenda for the civil society days at the GFMD.
- Practical issues related to civil society participation and coordination between CSO/GOB
- Discussed in detail the registration process and issues of deadline, as well as the timeframe for acceptance etc.
- Shared the logistical arrangements necessary both prior to and during the meeting in Mexico.

In the next session, the floor was open for discussion, and the following points were raised by various participants:

- Participants agreed with the RR for the need to create a working group, and the Secretary, MoEWOE requested a formal proposal regarding the matter, upon which his ministry will initiate and chair such a group, with support from IOM.
- All participants strongly felt the need for a coordination mechanism of the civil society participation at the GFMD, as well as closer coordination with the Government delegation prior to and at the meeting in Mexico. As such, IOM was requested to continue to hold such preparatory meetings and coordinate the civil society participation. Once Bangladeshi delegates have been nominated by GFMD authority, sub committees can be developed based on expertise on respective round tables. They also proposed whether IOM website can be used to share updated information on GFMD and for better coordination among civil society members of Bangladesh.
- Many participants felt that the GFMD should be binding, but it was pointed out that even though non-binding, many of the recommendations were actually implemented and the non-binding nature of it allowed unfettered dialogue between government representatives on various policy issues.

- It was also expressed that there should be a greater role for civil society participants in the GFMD, with recommendations that the government delegation could include as experts/resource persons representatives from CSO; a practice followed by many other countries, and also by GOB at different global meetings including more recently at the Copenhagen Climate Conference.
- Participants felt that migration and the growing irregularity in the recruitment process is an overarching issue, and needs to be addressed. References were made to the recently published G/TIP report where Bangladesh still remains on the Tier 2 Watch List with the primary reason being labour exploitation.
- There was a strong call from the floor to GOB to expedite the ratification of the Migrant Workers' Convention. Mr. Rahman assured the participants of his government's commitment to ratify this as soon as possible, but that at the moment there were some conflicts with the Constitution of Bangladesh that needed to be clarified before that can be done. Participants urged the government not to have any reservations when ratifying since that would be self-defeating.
- All participants felt that given that Bangladesh would be co-chairing the round table on Climate Change, that participation from relevant stakeholders was necessary. As such it was suggested that organizations working in climate change, environment and livelihood support should be invited to such future meetings.
- It was also felt that there needs to be greater awareness regarding the safe channels of migration in Bangladesh and consequences of migration through irregular channels. As such, the IOM project to pilot 7 Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) was shared with the participants and the possibility of converting all existing District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMOs) to also carry out the same function of raising awareness and distributing information to potential migrants.
- Participants also suggested that issues of migrant health should also be a priority at the GFMD given migrants' lack of access to medical facilities and harsh working and living conditions.
- All participants agreed that the nature of the GFMD changed depending on whether a destination country or country of origin was hosting the meeting. They felt that when hosted in a destination country the meeting was not as relevant to countries such as Bangladesh. They further hoped that the meeting in Mexico would be akin to the one held in Manila.
- Participants also expressed their concern at the future of GFMD and possibilities of it ever becoming a binding forum. Participants continued to feel that the non-binding nature of it leads to inaction.
- It was also suggested by participants about the possibility of a status report, in order to evaluate the achievements of each meeting and to have a sense of continuity between meetings.

CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, Ms. Shamsun Nahar, Joint Secretary, MoEWOE stated that even though a non-binding forum, the GFMD nonetheless continues to be an important forum for facilitating dialogue between countries on important policy issues such as protection of migrants, migration strategies etc. She said that the government of Bangladesh in particular found many of the recommendations useful in moving national policies forward. She shared her support for the creation of a working group under the chairmanship of MoEWOE, and for efforts to have a well coordinated and informed presence at the GFMD, both from the civil society and government representatives.