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Embassies' Proactive Role Stressed for Protecting Migrants at Destinations

Jul. 14, 2020

Md Owasim Uddin Bhuyan

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SPEAKERS

Moderated By



Dr. Dnyaneshwar M Mulay
Member, NHRC and Former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, India



Mr. Enrico T. Fos
Minister, Philippine Mission to the UN in Geneva (TBC)



Ms. Nahida Sobhan
Ambassador of Bangladesh to Jordan



Mr. Thomas Mathew Kadavil
Migrant Activist, Social Worker, Journalist, Kuwait



Ms. Sumitha Shaanthinnee Kishna
Advocate and Solicitor, Malaysia

Senior diplomats, migration experts and rights activists on Tuesday underscored the need for taking proactive role of the sending countries' embassies to protect rights of their migrant workers at the destination countries during and post COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking at a virtual panel discussion, they suggested the governments of the sending countries in South Asia to collectively deal migration issues with the worker receiving countries to solve the current problems, especially deportation and detention of undocumented migrants.

Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT), and Cross Regional

Center for Refugees and Migrants (CCRM) jointly hosted the webinar on "The Role of Diplomatic Missions in Assisting Migrants During and Beyond COVID-19."

Indian career diplomat Dr. Dnyaneshwar M Mulay, also incumbent member of the National Human Rights Commission of India, moderated the webinar which was attended by over 350 distinguished participants from across the continents.

In his welcome remarks, MFA' regional coordinator William Gois said that the diplomatic missions were playing important roles in protecting the migrants at the destination countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemics, the role of embassies had been more important dealing with the migration issues at the destination, he said.

William pointed out lack of monetary and human resources as problems for many Asian missions, and he suggested the government to look into urgently especially in countries that host large numbers of migrants.

To address the post COVID migration issues, he emphasized on 'balance responsibility' of the both governments of the origin and the destination countries.

Speaking as panelist, Malaysian lawyer Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna, also the director of 'Our Journey' said that the role of the missions became amplified during the COVID because it was a period of uncertainty especially when foreign nationals were forced to stay in a foreign country separated from their families back home.

'So it was inevitable for foreign nationals to turn to their missions for assistance,' she mentioned.

Sumitha said that many migrant sending country missions in Malaysia provided the necessary assistance to their nationals.

'Eg when the Malaysia government didn't provide food aid to foreign nationals during the lockdown, there were missions who took on that responsibility and also worked with civil society organisation, mine included, to provide food aid.'

This was not something that missions usually do but they learnt fast and did well.

Secondly, she said that the missions also provided the necessary information on their websites and facebook pages to their nationals on updates on travels, visa/passport renewals, translation of host government circulars.

Thirdly, she said that the missions coordinated the flights to for their nationals to fly back to their home countries although some of the charges were exorbitant, a cost which many migrants struggled to pay.

The consular assistance was also provided in a systematic manner eg for those who needed to renew their passports after the lockdowns were lifted,' she said.

In her concluding remarks, Sumitha said that missions must have dialogues and work together with all stakeholders including CSOs, migrant communities and the Diaspora group in host countries on how to move forward post COVID to

ensure that the rights and protection of vulnerable populations like migrant workers, undocumented migrants, domestic workers, foreign spouses and their children, are looked after.

Bangladesh Ambassador to Jordan Nahida Sobhan said that they were relentlessly working to provide services to Bangladeshi migrants, ensure their job security in destination and facilitate their repatriation if needed.

She said that the country of origin alone could do nothing for migrants except cooperation of the country of destination.

In replying to a question, Nahida Sobhan said that it would be better if the South Asian countries could work together to protect their migrants abroad.

In open discussion, Centre for Indian Migrants Studies director Rafeek Ravuther shared his views that the COVID pandemic has been an occurrence only and the countries of origin should take initiative to strengthen the regional mechanisms, Colombo Process and SAARC.

South Asian Regional Trade Union Council's general secretary Laxman Basnet said that South Asian countries, the largest migrants sending block should work together to protect their workers in GCC countries and Malaysia.

Bahrain based migrant rights activist Mehru Vesuvala emphasized forging strong partnership community and diaspora to protect migrants at destinations.

Among others, Sri Lankan Ambassador to Thailand Samantha Jayasuriya, Indian Consul General to Sydney, Australia Manish Gupta, Kuwait based Migrant Activist and Social Worker Thomas Mathew Kadavil and Josiane Antoine Noun of Lebanese Center for Human Rights delivered speeches as panelists.

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