

27 April 2020

The Secretary General
United Nations
United Nations Plaza
New York, New York.

Excellency,

We, the 16 members of Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM), recognize that you face a daunting task leading the world body at this critical time of human history beset by the Covid 19 pandemic.

We commend the statements that you have made since the outbreak of the crisis and measures that UN, particularly the World Health Organization, have undertaken to face the pandemic. We take the opportunity to apprise you of the plight of short term international migrant workers and members of Diaspora of Bangladesh in various destination countries. We are doing so with the humble request to exercise your authority on some of the destination countries.

We bring to your kind notice the following issues:

a. We are concerned that some destination countries are exerting pressure on the origin countries to take back the latter's nationals who have been deemed to be in irregular status and those in detention and/or prison. It is backed by a threat of blacklisting the origin countries which do not adhere to their wish. Under international law in any crisis situation it is incumbent upon the state concerned to take care of all people in its land including migrants, irrespective of their status. Moreover, bringing back migrants in the midst of a pandemic will heighten the risk of the spread of the virus that the concerned country can ill afford. We urge you as the Secretary General to appeal to those destination countries to refrain from pursuing such policy at this critical juncture.

b. Report from Singapore, a country that has been praised for managing the crisis, inform that there has been a major spread of the contagion among the migrant dormitories due to congested living conditions. Situation in other countries is likely to be worse. We appeal to you to urge the destination countries to ensure appropriate accommodation of migrant workers in which they can live safely in accordance with the WHO guidelines as much as possible.

c. Global data show the flow of remittance has substantially reduced since the onset of coronavirus pandemic. It is obvious that a large number of migrant workers have lost their jobs and are out of any income. This has put remittance dependent migrant households

vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. In addition because of the closure of many remittance transfer outlets in some areas of destination countries migrants who are still earning or have savings are facing difficulty in remitting money. We request you to use your good office and advise the governments of those countries to take appropriate measures so that migrants can transfer remittances to their families.

d. Reports of human rights organizations inform that in many countries employers have terminated the contracts of workers making the latter extremely vulnerable. We have learnt from communications with migrants and members of their families that many affected workers depend on charity to maintain subsistence and some have taken shelter in mosques and public places. We believe that governments of destination countries should discourage termination of workers. In case of such termination it is the duty of the destination countries to look after those retrenched. We implore you to exert the influence of the office of the Secretary General on the governments of destination countries to take the responsibility of this group of vulnerable workers at this time of crisis.

e. A large section of Bangladeshi diaspora is also going through a difficult time. Due to prolonged lockdown those who earn their living through small business, trading, vending and providing their labour in the formal and informal sectors are hard hit. Many require emergency food assistance and access to medical support. We commend the steps of Portugal for extending equal treatment of regular and irregular migrants in accessing healthcare and also of Spain and Portugal for considering regularization workers for specific period who are in irregular status. We appeal to you to invite other countries to take similar measures; particularly to ensure the food security to those members of diaspora who are in distress.

f. Many workers with valid work permit were laid off and repatriated in the wake of the crisis. A system should be put in place so that these workers are given the priority in employment when the economy of the concerned destination country opens up for workers from overseas. All dues and benefit claims of returnee workers should be settled as soon as the situation permits. We plead you to do your best so that the aggrieved migrant workers can get back their jobs and their dues.

g. Countries of origin now face the prospect of largescale unscheduled return of their nationals from the destination countries. These countries have very limited capacity to rehabilitate the returnees by engaging them in livelihood activities. Excellency, In the spirit of international solidarity we urge you to call upon international agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other development partners to create a global fund under the auspices of the United Nations to support the countries of origin in the rehabilitation of the returnee migrants. We also request you to mobilise the Global Migration Group to champion the cause of vulnerable migrants affected by Covid 19.



**Bangladesh Civil Society
for Migrants**

In this grim reality we consider you the only guardian of migrant workers to make a difference. We are convinced that your timely intervention to protect the vulnerable migrants will only reaffirm the spirit of the much celebrated SDGs – Leaving No One Behind.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

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