

STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AT THE  
WORKING SESSION 7  
HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING  
21 September 2016

Serbia has been faced with the problem of displacement for more than two decades. Our country is even today home to a total of 250,000 persons in protracted displacement, the largest number in Europe. The decrease in the number of refugees in the territory of the former Yugoslavia was largely the result of their integration in the Republic of Serbia, which involved over 300,000 people. In this way, Serbia has taken the largest burden of a durable solution for the refugee problem. Additionally, we have been investing continuous efforts to find sustainable and just solutions for refugees from the region and for IDPs on our territory.

Regrettably, out of 200 000 IDPs from our province of Kosovo and Metohija only less than 2% have returned to their homes. With rate of return less than a couple of hundreds per year, we need to urge for systematic measures to be taken in order to address all obstacles that impede exercise of rights of IDPs and their return. For many years now the IDP population from Kosovo and Metohija does not perceive return as a viable option because of security situation when basic human rights are not respected. The non-Albanian population, in particular Serbs, continue to face problems with freedom of movement, access to justice, language and property rights, protection of religious and cultural heritage, facing threats, maltreatment, physical assaults and property destructions. At the same time the inadequate institutional response and impunity for the perpetrators persists. The efforts to enable the sustainable returns must be our common goal and from our part we will continue to support the initiatives aimed at providing conditions for their safe and sustainable return.

Today we are facing a very serious refugee and migrant crisis which is intensifying in terms of scope and magnitude. We would like to express our deep regret at the large number of migrants and refugees, including women and children, who have lost their lives or have been exploited or endangered, and we stress the need to take immediate action to address this humanitarian crisis and prevent further loss of life and human suffering. We condemn violations of human rights and manifestations of violence, intolerance, extremism and discrimination against refugees and migrants and underline that responses to the ongoing migration and refugee crisis must be grounded in respect for human rights obligations and human dignity, in compliance with our respective international obligations and relevant OSCE commitments.

In the past year and a half more than 700,000 refugees and migrants transited through Serbia using so called Western Balkan route and Serbian people have been showing their empathy, solidarity and understanding, some of them recognizing their own past in what was happening. Since the beginning of the crisis, our Government selected proactive approach and in 2015 formulated the plan of action as a response to the increased influx of migrants and refugees, identifying the competent authorities, organizations and institutions and their respective tasks, measures and activities to be undertaken, as well as the resources needed. The measures have been aimed to ensure adequate protection and assistance to those in need by providing food, clothing, healthcare and special care for women, girls and children, as well as for the elderly and sick, including information to all migrants and refugees on their rights and asylum procedures. Enormous efforts have been made also to provide the migrants with adequate reception facilities, shelters, accommodation and transport. In this process we have been relying also on assistance of the International Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations, state donors and volunteers.

Serbia has been praised for its efficient and humane response, adequate managing of the situation and addressing all needs of people on the move. Nevertheless, from the very beginning it was clear that the situation depends on a number of different circumstances going beyond our borders. Serbia is a transit country and we often find ourselves in the situation when room for manoeuvre is reduced. As stated by First Deputy Prime Minister and MFA Mr. Đaković at the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, held on 19 September 2016, we do not want to erect walls and we are ready to show solidarity and bear our share of the burden of the crisis. However, as a country with the problem of protracted displacement for more than twenty years, we do not have a capacity to be a long-term, mass shelter for migrants. Therefore, we urge for a comprehensive European and global solution. The migration and refugee flows are transnational phenomenon affecting many participating States and going beyond particular region or route. Thus, it requires cooperative, coordinated and sustainable response.

Last but not least, let me also refer to the problem of trafficking in human beings. The intensified mixed migration flows have increased criminal activity along migration routes, including trafficking in human beings. Irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are those categories particularly at risk of human trafficking and exploitation and they need to be identified and protected, especially women, young girls and unaccompanied minors.

In its Response Plan the Government of the Republic of Serbia included the measures aimed at addressing irregular migration and trafficking in human beings, with special emphasis on the cases of persons belonging to vulnerable categories -minors unaccompanied by parents or guardians, young women, potential or identified victims of trafficking or persons subjected to any other form of violence. It is envisaged that border police officers would pay a particular attention to such persons to make sure that they have not been exposed to any kind of exploitation or any other form of violence and will take further appropriate steps. If they suspect that the person is victim of traffickers, the police officers will, without delay, inform the Centre

for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking, Service for the Coordination of Protection of Victims of Trafficking, the Centre for Social Services, the Prosecution Office and will take action to gather operational information with a view to shedding light on the criminal act of human trafficking or any other criminal act involving violence and will inform the competent chain of command in the work at the local police administrations.

The relevant authorities also pay particular attention in the asylum process, to sensitive and vulnerable categories of people, such as women and minors, who will be sent to the asylum centre accommodated to their special needs. Unaccompanied minor girls are being appointed guardians by the Centre for Social Services, who take care about their needs and the protection of their rights in the asylum application process.

As far as the proposal expressed by the USA Delegation to have the representatives of Priština around this table is concerned, we would like to underline that our position remains unchanged, it is well known and we cannot agree with such proposal. Let me also reiterate that the OSCE must retain its consistent status neutral position, in compliance with the UN SC Resolution 1244.