

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

International Protection of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

2 October 2014, Warsaw

UNHCR Statement

Distinguished Chairperson,
Dear Participants,

I would like to thank the organizers for convening this meeting and for allowing me to make a contribution on behalf of UNHCR. I will concentrate on recent developments related to the international protection of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The issue of statelessness will also be addressed.

Let me start by saying that, unfortunately, the world has not become a better place since last year. We are witnessing a turbulent period, which is demonstrated by our latest statistical report¹, which was released in June 2014. Over 42 million people currently of concern to UNHCR worldwide; these numbers are unprecedented. Maintaining protection at the centre of all our activities is an imperative for us. The figure includes approximately 12 million refugees, 10 million stateless persons and 24 million IDPs worldwide. When we look at the statistics in the OSCE region, at the end of 2013, the region hosted more than 2.2 million refugees, 1.2 million IDPs, 700,000 stateless persons and 580,000 asylum-seekers. Thus, issues of asylum, refugee protection and internal displacement remain one of the most serious humanitarian and human rights challenges in the OSCE region.

New emergencies evolved while others continue unresolved

Over the past year, instability and conflicts persisted in many parts of the world, leading to several new emergencies while others remained unresolved. Despite the generosity of host and donor States in the OSCE region, the large-scale population displacement from Syria and Iraq, and the continuous flow of refugees from the African continent, mean that humanitarian responses and community reception capacities were overstretched. OSCE participating States and Partners for Cooperation are not only affected by these on-going conflicts, but also face newly evolving emergencies within its own region, such as in Ukraine. As of end of last week, 368,000 Ukrainians now find themselves internally displaced² and 178,000 have applied for refugee status or temporary asylum in the Russian Federation³.

¹ UNHCR Global Trends 2013, June 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/5399a14f9.html>

² UNHCR/ SES, 26 September 2014

³ FMS, 25 September 2014

With an alarming number of new emergency situations and spiralling numbers of refugees, the high levels of forced displacement today are largely a result of conflict and violence. The changing nature of conflict is a phenomenon we, at UNHCR, are grappling with daily. Conflicts are not only *protracted*, but also appear *intractable* in the absence of broad-based and determined political resolve to end them. We note with deep concern that tens of thousands of people still remain affected by the number of protracted conflicts in the OSCE region, and are in need of durable solutions.

In the past year, also the Mediterranean Sea has been a place of terrible tragedies with thousands of persons losing their lives on dangerous sea journeys. In the mixed migration context, border closures, restricted access, arbitrary detention and other barriers and deterrents to admission and asylum were of serious concern. The gravity of these challenges provides the impetus for this year's High Commissioner's Dialogue on *Protection at Sea*, which will take place on 10-11 December 2014 in Geneva⁴. This Dialogue is a response to demands for greater collaboration on protection issues and to ensure that responses to mixed migration by sea are sensitive to the international protection needs of specific individuals and groups.

Nevertheless, there have been some improvements in the areas of statelessness and IDP protection. Let me start with statelessness. In UNHCR's view, this should not exist in the 21st century. Most stateless people live in the shadows, with little or no access to education, health care, social services or employment. Many are unable to move freely because of the lack of identity documents. In the past year, however, notable progress on statelessness was made, with greater resolve by States and other stakeholders to prevent and address the phenomenon. UNHCR has been working together with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in this regard. The *First Global Forum on Statelessness*⁵ took place with the participation of the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in The Hague, 15-17 September 2014. Two OSCE participating States have acceded to the UN statelessness conventions⁶ this year: Georgia to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and Belgium to the latter. At the end of the year, as it is the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention, UNHCR will launch a worldwide campaign to end statelessness.

The response to internal displacement was also strengthened. In the context of the inter-agency response to IDPs, the global protection cluster provided support to 31 country-level protection clusters worldwide and other field coordination mechanisms, 20 of which were led by UNHCR. UNHCR reached out to partners through the High Commissioner's *Dialogue on Protection Challenges* in December 2013 in which the issue of IDP protection was a focal point. Unfortunately, despite the significant progress in IDP protection, the number of newly displaced persons outpaced by far the number of solutions for IDPs which could be found. The failure to resolve long-standing conflicts meant that return and reintegration was an unrealistic option for many. Thanks to the goodwill of a number of host countries, the number of opportunities for local solutions expanded, however, modestly.

Let me remind you that OSCE participating States have committed to a number of decisions and declarations in the Human Dimension with regards to refugees, displaced persons, returnees and stateless persons. All of these commitments are still valid today. In Helsinki in 1992, OSCE participating States recognized the need for international cooperation dealing with mass flows of refugees and displaced persons. They recognized that displacement is often a result of violations of

⁴ High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/5357caed6.html>

⁵ <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/research/institutes-and-research-groups/statelessness/news/forum/>

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a2535c3d.html>

these OSCE commitments. This commitment was reiterated in 2011, through the adoption the Decision on the Elements of the Conflict Cycle by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vilnius. This decision emphasizes that the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and persons at risk of displacement or already affected by it, need to be protected in all phases of the conflict cycle.

Successful use of the Protection Checklist since its launch in February 2014

As a direct result of this Decision, UNHCR together with the OSCE developed the Protection Checklist⁷. It was successfully launched this year, in order to raise awareness of OSCE field staff, participating States, and relevant OSCE Institutions on displacement issues and to increase their capacity in addressing displacement. The Protection Checklist has been effectively used by OSCE Monitoring Officers in the Ukraine. Since the deployment of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in March 2014, the Protection Checklist has been distributed during the induction trainings of the Monitoring Officers. In June, joint UNHCR-OSCE trainings were given to 50 Monitors in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa and Lyiv on how to conduct interviews with IDPs and on the cooperation between OSCE and UNHCR in light of their respective mandates. These trainings familiarized OSCE staff with the content of the Protection Checklist in order to help them put its recommendations into practice.

Since then, the information gathered by the Monitors on specific protection needs of the displaced population has served as critical knowledge source for the Ukrainian Government, its partners, as well as the international community to find the right solutions for those in need. Inter-institutional cooperation increased between OSCE and UNHCR as Monitors were able to inform UNHCR in the field of the numbers, location and needs of displaced populations, which in turn facilitated rapid response.

This fruitful collaboration could serve as a model for future OSCE cooperation with humanitarian actors on the ground working to address the needs of people in displacement situations. With 1,2 million IDPs within the OSCE region, this could be a significant contribution.

As a next step, UNHCR and OSCE are planning to jointly undertake trainings for the regions of Central Asia, Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, including Caucasus, in 2015.

To conclude, UNHCR looks forward to further strengthening its collaboration with the OSCE. We stand ready to support efforts of participating States to protect and assist persons of concern with the ultimate aim of finding durable solutions.

Thank you!

*UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE
and Vienna-based UN Agencies
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⁷ The Protection Checklist can be downloaded at <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/111464>