

Special Thematic Event on IDPs and Refugees  
Vienna, 27 May 2011

### **Opening Remarks by Renatas Norkus, Chairperson of the Permanent Council**

It is my honour on behalf of the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship to warmly welcome the distinguished participants of this meeting, all those who travelled from the capitals of OSCE participating States and from OSCE field missions.

I would like to congratulate UNHCR on its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and warmly welcome Mr. Volker Tuerk, Director of International Protection of UNHCR. Thank you for co-hosting today's event. Our deliberations will benefit from your contribution, based on your vast experience and leading role on today's subject.

Thanks also to the Swiss delegation and Ambassador Greminger for making this event possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is vitally important that the OSCE remains actively engaged in addressing the issue of human displacement. The Lithuanian Chairmanship has explicitly referred to the plight of refugees and IDPs in the context of addressing the protracted conflicts in the wider OSCE space in the Chairmanship's Work Programme.

This discussion is also closely related to work underway on the conflict cycle in the framework of the V-to-V dialogues, since addressing human displacement is directly linked to issues of conflict prevention, post-conflict rehabilitation, stability and reconciliation.

In addition, Refugee/IDP issues are very much part of the daily work of some of our field operations in South Eastern Europe, where we have developed much experience and institutional knowledge in recent years.

The OSCE has supported the efforts of host governments and civil society, working in close cooperation with key international partners, notably UNHCR as the lead international agency in this field, the EU and others.

In the Western Balkans there is a successful and innovative process to facilitate durable solutions which well may serve as good practice for other regions of the OSCE.

Work on closing the so-called refugee file in South Eastern Europe is ongoing, and the OSCE's role and political support to the whole process is of paramount importance. The Belgrade Conference in March 2010 has been followed up by technical meetings, in addition to ongoing cooperation between participants on outstanding issues. However, the problem of displacement and the need for durable solutions is also an issue in other regions of the OSCE.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This "Special Thematic Event on Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees" is particularly timely.

2011 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. While there is much to celebrate, both for the OSCE Participating States and the United Nations members on progress achieved, this is also a time for stock taking and reflection.

Internal Displacement and the plight of refugees continue to form one of the most pressing humanitarian, human rights and political issues in the OSCE region, with over two million refugees, 1.5 million internally displaced and around one million returnees, stateless and other persons of concern in the OSCE region according to UNHCR figures.

Twenty one years ago, in the Paris Charter, the OSCE participating States committed to "human rights and fundamental freedoms as a birthright of all human beings, inalienable and guaranteed by law". They stressed that it is the responsibility of each government to protect and promote these rights as a foundation for freedom, justice and peace.

Since then, OSCE participating States have reaffirmed, specified and developed their commitments to refugees and internally displaced in a number of documents, as they are listed in the annotated agenda of today's meeting.

Furthermore, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol continue to form the backbone of the international normative protection framework for asylum seekers and refugees, to which 55 out of the total of 56 OSCE Participating States are already parties.

The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons as well as the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, set the legislative framework for dealing with issues related to statelessness and participating

States are encouraged to accede to these treaties. Other relevant international treaties, such as the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, continue to provide important complementary protection.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to offer a few questions that could be reflected at this Special Thematic Event.

The first question relates to whether the OSCE commitments and international instruments still provide an adequate legal and normative base to ensure effective protection and promotion of the rights of the internally displaced, refugees and stateless persons? Why do many IDPs and refugees still live in conditions depriving them of fundamental rights, and some of them even 20 years and more after having been forcefully displaced from their homes? Are there normative or operational gaps resulting from ongoing or new challenges in the OSCE area, which need to be identified and addressed?

If such gaps exist, how can the OSCE, its institutions and field missions contribute to filling them and develop a systematic and comprehensive approach to internal displacement? How can awareness and understanding of the international legal and normative framework and OSCE commitments be facilitated throughout the OSCE region among those key actors that can promote and implement effective solutions?

Thirdly, the question must be asked as to how OSCE participating States can strengthen their engagement and capacities in implementing OSCE commitments related to internally displaced, refugees and stateless persons, in particular how they can devise national legislation in compliance with the UN Guiding Principles and improve existing legislation, as well as promote and elaborate policies and programs designed to offer durable solutions, such as return, resettlement or local integration?

These are all relevant questions, and the OSCE together with specialized international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has great potential to contribute to finding effective solutions to the issue of the internally displaced, stateless persons and refugees.

Distinguished guests and participants, this meeting offers an excellent opportunity to consider how the work of the OSCE, its Field Operations and its Institutions can evolve in this area, which synergies and areas of cooperation

can be found with our specialized partners, and finally what tools, programs and resources are needed to do so.

I am convinced that our organization – which is based on dialogue and consensus – offers a unique platform to discuss and consider these issues.

I wish all of you productive discussions and encourage colleagues to use today's occasion to look ahead and – where possible – to identify possible solutions and practical proposals

Thank you.