

Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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Refugees and internally displaced persons

Mr. Moderator,

After 35 years since Helsinki Process was founded the question of respect of human dignity and right to live in native homes still remains valid and long-term solution of problems of displaced persons is linked ultimately with restoration of their right to return to their homes in safe conditions. Unfortunately, unlawful use of force is still not removed from the context of relations in the OSCE area. Today civilian populations are still suffering in our region due to the manifest failure of individual states to fulfill their most basic responsibilities. Governments failing to obey the rules of international conduct will inevitably infringe upon the individual liberties and freedoms at home, thus undermining democratic development.

As a result of aggression and ethnic cleansing conducted by the Republic of Armenia, one-fifth territory of Azerbaijan has been occupied and approximately one million Azerbaijani population has become forcibly displaced persons and refugees, their homes were devastated and looted.

This has been the largest-scale humanitarian tragedy in the OSCE area and a range of complex challenges and problems had emerged before the Azerbaijani authorities. During early years of displacement, large majority of the displaced persons lived in extreme conditions in twelve tent camps, sixteen “Finnish” style settlements constructed with prefabricated apartments, farms, in shelters by highways, cargo carriages on railways, education facilities and kindergartens and other buildings that lacked basic conditions and sanitary requirements for living.

In order to ensure efficiency and streamline the Government’s initiatives on resolving social problems faced by refugees and displaced persons there has

been set up the relevant State Committee headed by the Deputy Prime Minister. During the past period Azerbaijani authorities managed to provide a comprehensive legislative framework and a number of important laws and state programs aiming at improvement of living conditions and employment opportunities have been adopted and effectively implemented.

In the light of protraction of conflict settlement, the Government of Azerbaijan, namely the State Oil Fund has initiated measures on improving of housing conditions and as a result all tent camps were eliminated by the end of 2007. In general, in 2001-2009 hundreds millions USD were allocated from the Fund, 64 new settlements and individual houses have been constructed for tens thousands IDPs and refugees and hundreds houses were renovated.

Promotion of employment and reduction of poverty among refugees and IDPs, in particular creation of new jobs and production facilities in newly constructed settlements are among the main priorities of the Government and relevant provisions have been reflected in “State program on reduction of poverty and sustainable development in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2008-2015” and “Employment strategy for 2006-2015”. Established in 1999 Social Development Fund of IDPs has been co-operating with local and international partners, namely the World Bank in such fields as improvement of infrastructure, support of small entrepreneurship, facilitating community micro projects, etc. A number of steps were carried out with regard to better addressing of social protection of IDPs inter alia through raising allowances, salaries, and provisions. As a result of the implemented measures, poverty level among IDPs decreased from 74 per cent to 25 per cent in the last five years.

Nevertheless, certain problems still exist and currently the Government continues to construct new settlements, promote employment, elaborate joint projects with international partners, and develop the Grand Repatriation program together world financial institutions, UN agencies and humanitarian organizations.

In spite of the abovementioned, return of forcibly displaced persons to their homes stands as the most topical issue simply because fundamental freedoms can not be violated endlessly. Also we wish to underline that displaced persons should not turn into hostages of status-quo situation.

To conclude, we believe that the ODIHR should be more active in addressing the problems and challenges of displaced persons and elaborating appropriate ideas.

Thank you.