

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Working session 17: Refugees and displaced persons  
Remarks by Azerbaijan  
Delivered by Mr. Rashad Shirinov  
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Mr. President,

The Government of Azerbaijan highly values the cooperation on the issues of refugees and internally displaced persons not only in our own country, but also at the international level. It is with sorrow and regret that we note that as a result of conflict and natural calamities the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons has become even more dramatic all over the world, including Europe as it was the case before. The mass migration of people from Africa has put European continent in front of highly dangerous challenges and trends.

As is well-known, while having received humanitarian assistance in early 90s, Azerbaijan is becoming an emergency donor country as a result of its rampant growing economic power and financial means. Taking into account our own ongoing miserable experience in the issue of refugees and IDPs, we fully understand and stand ready to address the difficulties and concerns of countries suffering from this phenomenon. The current developments that are leading to the forced displaced as we speak once again demonstrate the need for the coordinated and coherent international cooperation on the international ground in order to eliminate its consequences. In our globalized world it would be absurd and naive to assume the non-impact of developments unfolding in different part of the world on our own – Europe. The disastrous and tragic events happening on the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, including Italy with regard to the massive loss of lives among African refugees and migrants in search of better life on European continent clearly prove it. We would call EU and its other member states to assist Italy in reducing its burden as the main EU member that is heavily exposed to this problem.

At the same time, it should be noted that new displacement issues that Europe confronted with at its southern and eastern borders require the detailed and in-depth focus of the international community on the root causes of the displacement. All the authoritative institutions, including the ones of the United Nations have clearly indicated impossibility of elimination and solution of forceful displacement without political settlement of root causes that led to it.

As a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967 and a new member of the Standing Committee of UNHCR, the Government of Azerbaijan well understands its primary obligation in tackling problems faced by refugees and IDPs stemming from the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and forced eviction of the local Azerbaijani population by Armenia. The current economic growth and economic achievements enabled Azerbaijan to advance livelihood opportunities of the IDPs. Today the projects concerning the

improving the accommodation facilities, employment opportunities and the promotion of self-reliance of refugees and internally displaced persons are being implemented to its fullest extent in our country.

As a result of the implementation of the “State Program on improvement of living conditions and employment rehabilitation of refugees and internally displaced persons” all tent camps were liquidated, living conditions of IDP families were improved, new settlements were founded for them. The program was designed in accordance with proposals received from affected communities, current realities and the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

These measures clearly demonstrate the sustained and firm commitment of the Government aimed at easing the sufferings of the internally displaced persons and solving their problems and these efforts are underway. UN High Commissioner for Refugees as well as UN HRC mandate holders on IDPs have seen these improvements while visiting the country in last 4 years and highly commended the efforts of the Government in this direction.

However, we would like to stress that in spite of growing state assistance for refugees and IDPs in Azerbaijan, their problems have not been fully resolved. Still about 400 thousand IDPs continue to live under difficult conditions not well-suited for accommodation. Azerbaijan still tops the first ranks in terms of IDPs per capita in the country. As it was clearly mentioned by the Special Rapporteurs of UN HRC the genuine solution of the problems faced by IDPs is withdrawal of occupying forces of Armenia from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan and ensuring the return of IDPs to their places of permanent residence in full dignity and safety. As you know, these demands have been fully reflected in UNSC and GA resolutions of 1993 and 2008 respectively.

Against this background, the policy and practice of the Republic of Armenia testifies to its intention to maintain the unacceptable status-quo through various illegal activities in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In its attempts to consolidate the unacceptable results of its armed aggression against Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia has long ago embarked on the implantation of the civil population of Armenian origin in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan in a clear and serious violation of the relevant provisions of the international human rights and humanitarian law instruments, including those of Geneva Convention IV.

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The fact-finding and field assessment missions by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan conducted on the initiative of Azerbaijan in 2005 and 2010 have well attested the settlement of ethnic Armenians to these regions from various countries. The missions concluded that about 14,000 Armenian settlers had replaced 750,000 Azerbaijanis forced to leave. The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group discouraged any further settlement of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and urged the parties to refrain from any activities in those territories that would change the demographic, social or cultural character of the areas affected by the conflict (such as continued illegal settlement, infrastructure developments, economic exploitation, cultural changes, etc.) and would make it impossible to achieve a peaceful settlement.

One of the last developments in that regard that was also conveyed to the attention to the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs was the illegal transfer of Syrian Armenians into the Nagorno Karabakh region and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan. We would renew our appeal to the relevant institutions of OSCE, especially Minsk Group Co-Chairs to remain focused and engaged in prevention of such illegal practices of the occupying power – Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and immediate and unconditional resettlement of those who have already moved to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

Finally, we would request the project proposals focused on the improvement of livelihood opportunities and better protection of IDPs, to be submitted by OSCE Project Coordinator in Baku to the relevant agencies of Azerbaijan for consideration.