



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Check against delivery

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 5 – Humanitarian issues and other commitments**

**Statement by
H.E. Mr. Dragiša Dabetić
Commissioner for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia**

Delegation of the Republic of Serbia

Warsaw, 24 September - 5 October 2007

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to inform you about the situation of displacement in Serbia. I shall focus only on the priorities. Unfortunately, there is no significant progress in the past year, especially concerning the return.

At the outset, I would like to present the latest figures concerning refugees and IDPs, as well as to inform you about some important developments concerning these two categories in the Republic of Serbia.

At the moment, Serbia is hosting half a million displaced persons. There are 209.579 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, and 98.104 persons with the refugee status. About 200.000 refugees have obtained Serbian citizenship in the past few years and still need further assistance for local integration. There are still 7.500 persons in 84 collective centers all over the Serbia.

Although the voluntary return is always the best solution, this process, unfortunately, is far from expected. According to our statistics, return to Bosnia and Herzegovina stands at around 30%, to Croatia around 18% and to Kosovo and Metohija only a few thousand returned.

We wish to emphasize that the return of displaced population to Kosovo and Metohija, after eight years of international presence in the Province is symbolic. In order to significantly increase the number of returnees, international community has to ensure all necessary preconditions and guaranties for sustainable return of IDPs, such as their full enjoyment of fundamental human rights – right to life, freedom of movement, property rights, economic, social and cultural rights etc.

IDPs are citizens of the Republic of Serbia and they enjoy equal rights as all other citizens in the Republic. I have to recall you that they belong to 31 ethnic groups and almost 60.000 of them are not Serbs (75% Serbs, 10.85% Roma, 2.5% Muslims, 1.5% Goranians, and below 1% - Albanians, Ashkaly, Egyptians, Hungarians, Macedonians, Turks, Croats etc.). The most vulnerable IDPs who applied for our assistance were provided with shelter. As all other citizens, IDPs have free access to education, healthcare, opportunities for employment, participation in social and political life etc. However they are still in a very difficult situation.

The future status of Kosovo and Metohija must ensure the full respect of human rights of all national communities. This means access to all rights, including the return of IDPs. We expect peaceful and mutually acceptable solution for the future status of Kosovo and Metohija, based on international law, including the respect of the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia.

Mr. Chairman,

The Republic of Serbia continues with its efforts with regard to both, voluntary repatriation and local integration of refugees. According to our National Strategy, these two processes are parallel and complementary.

Amendments to the 1992 Law on Refugees are in the procedure. Their adoption will additionally facilitate the process of integration in Serbia. New Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Serbia already facilitated obtaining of the citizenship to refugees. Also, together with representatives of international community, especially UNHCR and OSCE, we are working on certain amendments to the National Strategy that will contribute to finding durable solutions.

Housing is one of the biggest problems for refugees. We will continue various integration programs. However, in order to meet all the needs, additional financial resources are required. I have to emphasize that currently our main donors are European Union, UNHCR, as well as some governments bilaterally.

We would like to reiterate our position that voluntary return is the best durable solution for the remaining displaced population in our region. Therefore, we underline the importance of repossession of property and of full respect of occupancy/tenancy and property rights, without any discrimination that would provide refugees with much needed resources to opt between the repatriation and local integration. We hope that through the implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration, initiated by OSCE, UNHCR and European Commission and signed by the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro, all parties involved in the process, including international community, will make all efforts to overcome the problems that still exist in this field.

Unfortunately, the fact is that the process is practically blocked, since there are a number of outstanding issues which were not included in the Road Map of Croatia.

Two main outstanding issues have been identified:

- the issues of the holders of terminated occupancy/tenancy rights;
- and convalidation of working years.

During early nineties significant number of refugees were forced to leave their apartments and their occupancy/tenancy rights were terminated in BiH and Croatia. In Bosnia and Herzegovina restitution of these rights took place. In Croatia there is still no visible progress on this issue. There are approximately 30.000 terminated

OTR, which affect 100.000 persons. This is not the issue of social housing, since all OTR holders were financially participating in housing funds for years. Also after the termination of the rights of OTR holders – Croatian authorities sold those apartments to new occupants. It is of great importance to identify mechanisms that would lead to comprehensive and just solutions for holders of terminated occupancy/tenancy rights. No doubt, it cannot be done only through so called housing care program of the Croatian Government.

The Republic of Serbia would like to reiterate its firm commitment to the Sarajevo process aiming at full implementation of the Sarajevo declaration. I have to stress that the next few months are crucial for the process. There is no more time for creating the impression that Sarajevo process is progressing. Very soon concrete improvements have to be achieved. Otherwise, international community should be informed why the process did not succeed.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, let me point out that Serbia, despite its very difficult economic transition, is making tremendous efforts to provide assistance to both refugees and IDPs. We would like to assure you that we remain committed to continued cooperation with international community and our neighboring countries, to achieve sustainable durable solutions for displaced population in our region. In that regard we still need sufficient resources and significant assistance of the international community.

Thank you Mr. Chairman