



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Session 11: Humanitarian issues and other commitments**

Migrant workers, the integration of legal migrants;  
Refugees and displaced persons;  
Treatment of citizens of other participating States.

*As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Clifford Bond  
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Warsaw, October 6, 2008*

Mr./Madam Moderator:

The current situation in Georgia is very relevant to our discussion today. The plight of Georgia's citizens fleeing their villages and towns, their homes burning and livelihoods destroyed, is painful. It is made even more so by concerns that displaced persons may have difficulty returning in light of the volatile and hostile security environment.

The UNHCR estimates that in total more than 192,000 men, women and children were displaced during the recent conflict – 157,000 within Georgia and some 35,000 who fled to the Russian Federation. The continuing social and political instability in and around South Ossetia is contributing to growing lawlessness in these areas, which in turn is leading to even greater displacement. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has expressed specific concern about reports of forcible displacement caused by marauding militias north of Gori near South Ossetia following the cease fire agreement. In light of these continuing reports we remind the Russian Federation that it has a responsibility to ensure the safety of the civilian population in areas under its effective control and to allow for the voluntary return of displaced persons.

While some have since been able to return home, about 54,000 people remain displaced by the fighting, and are primarily sheltered in schools, hospitals and previously abandoned buildings. UNHCR estimates that 23,000 will require alternative shelter before the onset of the winter months. The remaining 31,000 will join 230,000 Georgian displaced from South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the 1990s as long term IDPs. As of mid-September, the United States government had provided over \$38 million in humanitarian aid and emergency relief supplies (i.e., antibiotics, burn bandages and first aid kits, tents, sleeping bags, blankets, hygiene kits, food, and water ) to the Georgian people. Clearly more assistance will be needed.

Mr./Madam Moderator, the conflict in that area continues. We are concerned about statements made by the de facto leader of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, that his soldiers and Russian forces behind them, had driven out the ethnic Georgians who had been living there and will not allow them to return, even though the situation is deemed calm enough for several thousand residents of South Ossetia who had fled to Russia to return home. We call on both Georgia and Russia to work to ensure that civilians are not subject to attack or displacement based on

ethnicity and that those uprooted by the conflict are allowed to voluntarily return in safety. We also join calls already made at this meeting for full access for the High Commissioner for National Minorities, as well as human rights monitors, throughout the region.

The plight of internally-displaced persons in Georgia, including South Ossetia, is sadly also replicated all too often in other parts of the OSCE region. While much has been done to raise awareness on this issue at the governmental level, not enough has been done to ensure it translates into concrete actions that make a real difference for the men, women and children whose lives have been so horribly disrupted.

A related issue is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Its costs can still be counted in terms of refugees and displaced persons – nearly a million altogether – provinces denuded of populations, lost economic opportunities, and disrupted trade. The U.S. government encourages the parties to show greater flexibility and creativity in their negotiations. We will do everything possible to promote a just and lasting settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that proceeds from the principle of our support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, and ultimately incorporates other elements of international law and diplomatic practice.

As we all should admit, Mr./Madam Moderator, these problems are frequently allowed to linger far too long. We must work to find durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the OSCE region.

We call on all OSCE countries to honor their obligations under international law to protect refugees living within their borders and not to refoule refugees in violation of their treaty obligations. We are also concerned that Kyrgyzstan has refused to extend the certificate of registration for Uzbek refugees which would allow them to stay in Kyrgyzstan while they seek refugee status with the UNHCR.

We are also concerned about working and living conditions of labor migrants elsewhere in the OSCE region. For example, there are approximately 700,000 Tajiks working abroad and best estimates are that 90 percent or more of them are working in the Russian Federation. While workers and their families often benefit economically through the ability to earn higher wages and remit those wages back home, there are also increased reports of labor trafficking, worker exploitation, ethnic discrimination and even ethnic-related violence and murder. To be sure, these types of incidents can be found in other OSCE participating States that attract labor migrants. The Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities has published an excellent best practices guide that will help ensure the fair treatment of labor migrants. We must not overlook, however, the need to create not only legal and political frameworks for labor migration, including social frameworks but also to encourage and foster the humane treatment of labor migrants, and a tolerant environment toward different ethnicities.