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**Statement by Fuad HUSEYNOV,  
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Republic of Azerbaijan  
at the Human Dimension Implementaion Meeting organized  
under the OSCE**

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Distinguished delegates! Ladies and gentlemen!

Allow me first to sincerely welcome each and every one of you and express deep gratitude to the Italian chair in the capacity as an OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Director of ODIHR, for organizing and inviting us to this event on humanitarian issues, which is of a special importance for Azerbaijan as a country, which hosts, in per capita terms, one of the highest caseloads of refugees and IDPs in the world.

An expansion of geographical area of conflict zones around the globe in recent years, rapid growth in the numbers of those who lost their lives or were forced to flee their homes following these events as well as the impotence of international organizations in conflict prevention poses a grave concern to our country, too.

We believe that first and foremost the international community should not allow for the creation of new world conflict zones, at the same time should seek solutions to the existing conflicts based on a fair stance, prevent acts contradicting international law, strengthen the determination of bringing to international justice and putting pressures against those states which are not serious about complying with international obligations.

Distinguished delegates of the event!

Failure to tackle the problem of refugees and IDPs is a serious threat not only for those countries but for the entire region. At the summit in Astana, heads of states recognized unequivocally the link between security and human rights and fundamental freedoms. For this reason, the OSCE participating States, the OSCE executive structures should strengthen their efforts to come up with concrete proposals so as to how to ease sufferings of refugees and IDPs and settle the problems this vulnerable group is facing with.

Noting OSCE's role in this matter, we would like to point out the significance and comprehension of the commitments adopted at the Ministers or Summit meetings. The commitments made in relation to property, respect for private and family life, effective protection and ensuring rights of refugees and internally displaced persons for a safe and dignified return to their lands are reflected in the following documents: Vienna 1989, Helsinki 1992, Stockholm 1992, Budapest 1994, Lisbon 1996, Istanbul 1999, Bucharest 2001, Maastricht 2003, Sofia 2004, Ljubljana 2005 and Hamburg 2016. Now, it's a high time to find practical means to implement these commitments.

It is of vital importance to strengthen cooperation with relevant international organizations and institutions, including UNHCR, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs and ICRC, through exchange of information, including reports, and further development of future activities within the framework of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, under a regional arrangement in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

UN's and OSCE's relevant experience and knowledge in this field can complement each other. Experience of cooperation between the UN and the OSCE resulted in the Protection Checklist developed few years ago. Thus, the existing cooperation needs to be further strengthened for international community's and particularly for refugees and internally displaced persons' sake.

I would like to take this opportunity to brief the participants on the activities undertaken in this area in Azerbaijan.

700,000 IDPs who were forcibly displaced from their historical places of origin and whose human rights were grossly violated as a result of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno Karabakh conflict lived in dire conditions for more than 25 years, but nevertheless retained high hopes and expectations for the settlement of the problem and soonest return to their permanent places of residence.

The state and government of Azerbaijan are doing their best in order to address issues related to the internally displaced persons in two directions:

- The first direction – addressing the social problems of people living in hard conditions for a long period of time.

As stated in the “UN Guiding Principles on internal displacement,” adopted in 1998, the primary responsibility for a voluntary, safe and dignified return of IDPs to their homes or places of habitual residence or for creation of conditions that would allow relocation, on a voluntary basis, to any part of the country rests with national authorities.

Azerbaijani state and government recognizes this responsibility pretty well and honors the requirements of the Guidelines with a great deal of respect.

The Government of Azerbaijan has been doing a lot to alleviate sufferings of this vulnerable group in both legal and socio-economic fields and continues to do so. Azerbaijan has developed a national legislation system in relation to the displaced people, which is in full conformity with international norms and regulations.

*Starting from 1993, 98 orders and decrees were signed by the President, 370 resolutions and decrees were approved by the Cabinet of Ministers and 34 laws were adopted by the National Parliament including the Law “on Citizenship” of 1998, the Law “on the status of Refugees and IDPs” of 1999 and “Social Protection of IDPs and persons equated to them” of 1999. In this respect two state programs have been approved to date.*

98 new modern residential complexes were built for the internally displaced people who have been forced to flee their homes. 53 thousand families or 265 thousand people were provided with the new housing. The IDPs are under the full care of the state, they are exempted even from all utility fees.

In order to address social problems of refugees and internally displaced persons, a total amount of USD 7 billion was spent in the last 25 years.

- Second direction – preparation for return of IDPs and implementation of this process in the planned manner once lands are liberated.

I would like to draw your kind attention to the fact that drawing on international experience and based on proposals received from state bodies and international organizations, the Government has developed a detailed repatriation program officially called “Great Return”, which asserts the principle of voluntary return in the context of an eventual settlement of the conflict. The Government of Azerbaijan will take further these efforts by developing a strategic action plan which could serve in the technical implementation of the program. In particular, such an action plan could address the complex issues which cannot be properly addressed in the course of a rapid and mass return movement, such as the challenge of building a new market economy, addressing property issues, compensation for the losses incurred and privatization, ensuring the issuance of demining certificates and increasing the capacity of relevant actors. The expertise of different agencies and actors, such as UNHCR and development organizations, could provide valuable technical assistance in this regard. Such a framework would be invaluable in addressing many of the complex and technical aspects related to eventual returns (e.g. infrastructure, economic and property issues) and greatly improve the state of preparedness should progress in the ongoing peace negotiations allow for voluntary returns.

Last year the Government of Azerbaijan embarked already on the first stage of return by rehabilitating a village of Jojuq Marjanli (the only village of Jabrail district liberated from occupation) and returning 150 IDP-families to their native lands, in dignity and on a voluntary basis.

The program envisages carrying out the following tasks:

- preparation of IDPs for return process to their native lands;
- clearing territories, after the liberation, of all explosive remnants, which are considered dangerous to human life;
- rehabilitating socio-technical infrastructure and residential settlements, creating normal conditions for people's life;
- ensuring the right of IDPs to return, voluntarily and in dignity, taking into consideration international and national legislation requirements;
- creating safe living conditions for IDPs returning to places of their habitual residence;
- provision of employment for IDPs returning to their homes, particularly for youth;
- ensuring transparency in the implementation of these activities, involvement of international financial institutions and organizations into the process and regular update of the public about the activities undertaken.

In order to start the implementation of the program, the occupied lands must be liberated and historical justice restored first. Only after that the total amount of work will be determined in details based upon a wide analysis of all areas concerned.

After the implementation of all the necessary measures, the process of return of IDPs will be carried out in a transparent manner by relevant national authorities, along with international financial institutions and organizations, civil society institutions, representatives of IDP communities.

We hope that the conflict will be brought to an end soon and the "Great Return" Program will be successfully implemented with the participation of all concerned parties, including the OSCE and its executive structures and institutions, and the rights of internally displaced persons will be restored finally.

In conclusion, we would like to put forward some of the following recommendations:

1. In line with the decision of Lisbon Summit (1996) and other relevant commitments pS and OSCE structures and institutions should condemn any policy of 'ethnic cleansing' or mass expulsion and focus on practical implementation of the commitment to facilitate return, in safety and in dignity, of refugees and IDPs;
2. to apply a comprehensive approach and, by doing so, to integrate the issue of refugees and IDPs into all three dimensions (politico-military; economic and environmental; and the human);
3. to authorize the Conflict Prevention Centre to integrate the protection of rights of displaced persons in its activities within the framework of post-conflict rehabilitation element of "conflict cycle";
4. to conduct review on the implementation of relevant OSCE commitments on refugees and IDPs in the region and task ODIHR with preparing a respective report;
5. to task ODIHR with stimulating exchange of the best practices and information among the OSCE participating states and other international organizations;
6. to task ODIHR, at the request of states, with providing expert opinion during preparation and implementation of refugees and IDPs' return programs.

As a response to Armenia delegation and reference to so-called Artsakh, I would like to remind that the UN Security Council not only did not mention, in any of its four resolutions or in any of statements by its President, the existence of so-called Artsakh, "the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh", "the people of Nagorno-Karabakh", its "right to self-determination", but rather condemned the use of force in relation to Azerbaijan and the occupation of its territory; reaffirmed respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of its international borders; confirmed that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is an inalienable part of Azerbaijan; and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from all occupied territories.

Thank you for your attention.