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**OSCE
HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING 2017
Warsaw, Poland**

**Monday, 18 September 2017
WORKING SESSION 11, 3-6 p.m.
Humanitarian issues and other commitments:**
– Combating trafficking in human beings
– Refugees and displaced persons
– Persons at risk of displacement

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh)

Mr. Moderator,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my concern about the continuing lack of attention by OSCE institutions to human rights and fundamental freedoms of people living in conflict areas, especially the refugees and displaced persons, as one of the most vulnerable groups.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) began to appear in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) along with the intensification of the conflict that arose as a result of attempts by the Azerbaijani authorities to use force to suppress the right of the Armenian population of Artsakh to self-determination.

According to the Artsakh Union of Refugees, during 1988-1991, more than 100,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan fled to Nagorno-Karabakh. A significant part of them continue to live in Nagorno-Karabakh to this day.

Today, there are over 30,000 refugees and displaced persons living in Artsakh, which is almost a quarter of the total population of the republic.

In addition to this, a new wave of displacement was triggered by Azerbaijan's large-scale aggression against Artsakh in April 2016, which was accompanied by unprecedented atrocities both against civilians and soldiers of the Artsakh Defence Army.



Unlike other situations, displaced persons living in conflict areas are deprived of international protection and assistance due to systematic attempts by some participating States to impede the humanitarian access of international organizations, including UNHCR, to these areas. This situation runs counter to the OSCE commitments on non-discrimination against refugees and IDPs. This deplorable situation must change and the OSCE should engage and play a more active role, primarily in facilitating the activities of UNHCR and UN special procedures in addressing the issue of displacement in the entire OSCE region, including unhindered access to conflict areas.

Furthermore, due to the persistent non-compliance of Azerbaijan with its international commitments of non-use or threat of force, a significant part of the population of Artsakh are constantly exposed to the risk of displacement. Any serious escalation of the situation on the ground, among other things, is fraught with the risk of causing new waves of displacement and suffering of the civilian population. To prevent such a situation, the OSCE, whose core task is to prevent conflicts and crises through confidence and security building measures, should expand its presence and activities in conflict areas. Human rights and fundamental freedoms of displaced persons living in conflict areas should be high on the agenda of the OSCE. The organization should engage more actively in preventing forced displacement, as well as facilitating humanitarian access of international organizations, including UNHCR, to all conflict-affected areas in the OSCE region, without exception.

The events of April 2016 demonstrated how dangerous it is to ignore the issue of protecting the rights of people living in conflict areas, and how the insufficient attention to this problem can lead to serious consequences for regional peace and security.

Thank you for your attention.