



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to António Guterres UN High Commissioner for Refugees

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 20, 2014

The United States extends a warm welcome to High Commissioner António Guterres. The broader OSCE region, including participating States and Partners for Cooperation, grapples with significant challenges related to refugees, displaced, and stateless persons. Their well-being is a longstanding priority of the United States. We hope that increased collaboration between the OSCE and UNHCR will lead to a renewed effort to address their plight.

As you have very clearly illustrated, the largest refugee crisis facing the OSCE community is caused by the ongoing conflict in Syria. Turkey shelters over 600,000 Syrian refugees, Jordan hosts over 590,000, and Egypt, 130,000. We recognize the challenge providing this humanitarian assistance is for these countries, and we urge members of the OSCE community to support their efforts.

In the Western Balkans, UNHCR and the OSCE play key roles in addressing the needs of refugees. The Regional Housing Programme is one of the most important collaborative projects to help refugees return to a normal life, and we commend the work done by UNHCR and the OSCE field missions in the region to complete this task.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are also a concern in the Western Balkans, Central Asia and the South Caucasus. UNHCR continues to help the Government of Kyrgyzstan reintegrate over 170,000 IDPs affected by the June 2010 ethnic clashes. Georgia and Azerbaijan also have large populations of IDPs as the result of unresolved conflicts. Their struggle to rebuild secure and productive lives demonstrates the urgent need to resolve these conflicts.

Whether they are refugees in a foreign land, migrants, or internally displaced within their own country, persons uprooted from their homes deserve to be treated with respect and humanity. To that end, we encourage participating States to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons, to find durable solutions for such persons, and to treat all persons with respect and in accordance with relevant obligations under international law. We also urge all participating States to establish an effective domestic asylum screening system to identify asylum seekers upon arrival and provide appropriate reception and care for those who may be in need of international protection. Participating States should also put in place national refugee status determination systems to assess asylum claims in cooperation with UNHCR and to ensure that the appropriate legal safeguards are in place to prevent deportations and extraditions that constitute *refoulement*.

Finally, we commend UNHCR and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre for developing a “Protection Checklist for Addressing Displacement and the Protection of Displaced Populations and Affected Communities.” This protection checklist is a concrete example of the OSCE’s cooperation with UNHCR and other organizations to prevent or respond to displacement. This collaborative approach shows the collective benefits of drawing on each organization’s strengths.

Thank you again High Commissioner. We wish you all the best in your important work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.