



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 28 September – 09 October 2009

S T A T E M E N T

by

Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia

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Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen

The Republic of Serbia is the state with the only one protracted refugee and IDP situation and with the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Europe. According to the official and UNHCR statistics the number of refugees in the Republic of Serbia has decreased by more than 80%, and from more than more than half a million refugees registered in 1996, today, 86.000 persons remain in that status.

The reduction of the number of refugees is primarily the result of their integration into the Republic of Serbia, which implies more than 250.000 persons having acquired the Serbian citizenship.

On the territory of the Republic of Serbia there are about 210.000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija residing, which raises the total number of persons by displacement persons in this moment to up to 300.000. The return of the displaced to Kosovo and Metohija after ten years of international presence in the province continues to be merely symbolic.

As the Country with a protracted refugee situation in Europe, we believe that solution for this long lasting crises should be sought and found within the basic human rights principles that stand behind any sustainable return and integration – namely, granting unimpeded access to all individual rights in the countries of origin in a free and non-discriminatory manner.

Only through the restitution or just compensation for all the individually acquired rights, such as property, tenancy/occupancy labor, pension rights and others, can refugees finally achieve durable solutions, and the states in the region can ensure their European perspective.

Failing to set up adequate mechanisms directly interferes with refugees' right to freely choose between the return and local integration and with practical realization of either of the options.

For those refugees not able to return to their states of origin, the restoration of their personal and property rights has to be guaranteed, and it is the duty of the international community to persistently influence the respective states of origin to fulfil their obligation concerning the equal treatment of all their citizens pursuant to the universal principles of respecting human rights.

The Republic of Serbia, according to its capacities, is providing the best possible care and support for the integration of refugees. In this endeavour the Republic of Serbia had the support of the international community, but the resources have not been sufficient enough to remedy this problem.

But this is not only an issue of money; there is a need for political involvement of all international actors and the OSCE .

We strongly emphasize the importance of continuing and further strengthening of multilateral cooperation, in accordance with strategic EU-accession frameworks of the involved countries and in accordance with the principle of equality.

Unfortunately, commitments taken within Sarajevo process have not been fulfilled which strongly influences the processes of return and/or local integration.

Premature conversion of the OSCE mission in some countries in the region into the office with restricted scope of responsibility, created the lack of cooperation and verification mechanism at the regional level.

In the same time, I would like to stress that the Republic of Serbia remains committed and persists on investing its efforts towards accepted obligations, for it is one of the requirements on its way towards the European Union. Because of that we expect that the very same will also be required from the other countries in the region.

Mr. Chairman

I would like to inform that the International Regional Conference on the subject of "Durable Solutions for Refugees – Obligations and Cooperation in the Region in the Process of European Integrations", will be held in Belgrade on 10 November this year. We sincerely hope that we will succeed in indentifying, in the spirit of constructive dialogue, the problems in resolving the refugee issue and finding durable, just and sustainable solutions for the refugees in the region.

It is foreseen that the upcoming conference will be held on a high working level with the participation of the competent government representatives of the states in the region regarding the subject of refugees and European integrations, the representatives of the European Commission, the UNHCR, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, as well as the other relevant subjects.

The aim of the conference is to identify the way of future cooperation on resolving refugee as well as how to support the regional approach of solving these issues with the assistance of the international community.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, allow me to stress that the Republic of Serbia will continue cooperating with the international community and the neighbouring states in order to find possible and durable solutions for the war affected population in our region.

We are also convinced that the closure of protracted refugee situation should be a joint effort, and responsibility of all countries in the region.

I would like once more to thank OSCE for all support it has provided over the years to all war affected population in the Republic of Serbia.

Thank you Mr. Chairman