



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

**WORKIN SESSION 11
HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AND OTHER COMMITMENTS II**

**Statement by
Director of Department for Area of Special State Concern
Ministry of Regional Development, Forestry and Water Management
Ms. Anna-Maria Radić**

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Mr. Chairman,
You're Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Delegation of the Government of the Republic of Croatia I will present to you the newest developments regarding the refugee return to Croatia. Croatian Government regards issues of the return and integration of refugees as the important humanitarian issue that should be resolved as a matter of priority.

Since early 90's Croatia achieved cumulate success regarding the return of refugees and IDPs in accordance with the International standards - 221,000 IDPs and 126,000 refugees - members of minorities, mostly ethnic Serbs, have returned to Croatia from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro have returned; over 45,000 refugees from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have locally integrated; 146,000 houses and flats out of 195,000 destroyed or damaged during the war have been rebuilt; 19,000 houses have been returned to their owners; return of refugees to Bosnia and Herzegovina was assisted by rebuilding of 5,100 houses.

The last group of refugees whose return has not been fully accomplished is those that used to hold – in former Yugoslavia - so-called tenancy rights. In order to further facilitate the return of these refugees, Croatian Government in 2008 adopted *the Action Plan for the Accelerated Implementation of the Housing Care Program for Returnees who are ex-Tenancy Right Holders* covering the period of three years. It is worth to note that the Action Plan is a project of a coalition government with the participation of the party of Croatian Serbs.

Intensive and accelerated implementation of all activities laid down in the *Action Plan* is underway – at the moment we are at the 63% of implementation of a total of envisaged 5,000 ex-OTRs who has been and will be given an apartment in Croatia. So far Croatia has proven consistent commitment in the implementation of all remaining obligations, relying almost exclusively on its own funds and investing to that purpose 5,3 billion Euros.

The 2007 benchmark has been fully met despite delays that we had faced resulting in provision of an apartment for 1,400 families. Also, we finished the implementation of the 2008 objective of 1,427 families of ex-tenancy right holders (ex-OTRs) provided with an apartment on a key-in-hand principle. The implementation of 2009 objective of 2,100 ex-OTRs in line with the Action Plan has been slower than originally planned in the Action Plan for the reason of the economic recession.

The important progress has been achieved since 2007 when we have started with this extensive undertaking. Since then we were able to set off the reconstruction of 2,150 flats in the areas of special state concern (ASSC), out of which some 1,300 still under reconstruction are to be finished next year. In the same period we purchased a total of 966 apartments in urban areas.

These efforts and results are positively outlined in various reports of the representatives of the international community. During his last visit to the region UN High Commissioner for Refugees expressed his satisfaction with the success of the refugee return process in Croatia.

Unfortunately, due to the economic recession, the goals that we set for the 2009 will be in their entirety realized only in 2010. However, I would like to stress that - despite recession and budgetary cuts - we managed to increase the budget for some parts of that program.

Regarding regional aspect of refugee issue we emphasize the fact that Croatia has fulfilled its obligations stemming from the international refugee law and the regional 2005 Sarajevo Declaration. The results achieved by Croatia are widely acknowledged, while at the same time the number of refugees originated from ex Yugoslavia conflict is decreasing in all recipient states.

Only exception of this trend is reported from Serbia. Despite the significant numbers of the reported returns, last four years Serbia and the UNHCR have been constantly operating with the figure of some 70,000 refugees from Croatia still residing in Serbia.

However, according to recent UNHCR assessment this number is not a reliable one. It is evident that many of them have double citizenships and are double registered, both as returnees and refugees (24,254 persons). Taking into account that it's been more than 18 years after the beginning of the war, there is a high probability that a number of refugees have become in the meantime citizens of the recipient country. Therefore, the re-evaluation of their refugee status in accordance with the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is needed, as it has been done with the locally integrated persons in other recipient countries.

In this respect, the Republic of Croatia has initiated a closer bilateral cooperation aimed at fostering exchange of all relevant data on the refugee return issue. By this approach the outstanding open issues can be 'individualized', while at same time affording the appropriate attention to local integration of those who do not wish to return.

To conclude, let me restate the Croatian Government commitment to fulfill our legal and political obligations according to the framework and benchmarks that are part of the accession process to European Union. The results achieved in the course of the last few years can confirm our determination to resolve all remaining case of refugees returning to Croatia.