

***Statement on
Donors' Conference on durable solutions for refugees and internally
displaced persons (IDP) in the Western Balkans
delivered by
Mrs. Sanja MILINKOVIĆ
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at the Permanent Council Meeting No. 904, March 8, 2012***

I have the honor to read this statement on behalf of delegations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia.

As we have already approached the Human Dimension Committee on the occasion of the briefing provided by Personal Envoy of High Commissioner for Refugees Mr. Anne Willem Bijleveld we would like to inform the Permanent Council that the regional Donors' Conference on durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) in the Western Balkans will be held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on April 24, 2012. This conference is convened on the basis of a Joint Declaration, signed by our four foreign ministers last November in Belgrade, on ending displacement and ensuring durable solutions for vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons. As a consequence of armed conflicts in 1990s, over 3 million people were displaced both within and beyond the borders of the four countries and several hundred thousands still remain displaced.

The Partner countries also launched a Regional Housing Programme, which is an integral part of the said Declaration, aiming to comprehensively contribute towards completion of the protracted displacement situation in the four countries providing: durable and sustainable solutions with full respect for the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons and the mutual obligation to closely cooperate and synchronize activities in order to ensure durable solutions for them, either through voluntary return and reintegration or local integration.

The Regional Programme's aim is to provide durable solutions for the most vulnerable refugees and displaced persons - 74 000 individuals. The total envisaged expenses are 580 million Euros of which the four Partner countries will contribute with 84 million. The Programme should begin this year with the implementation period of 5 years. UNHCR, OSCE, European Commission and the Government of the USA strongly encourage and support this Programme. We would like to avail of this opportunity to once again express our gratitude to them, as well as the whole international community which have been investing considerably to provide durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons.

On the operational level, the European Commission (EC) and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) will assist the Partner Countries in implementing the Programme. CEB will manage the Regional Housing Programme Fund, which will be supervised by a Steering Committee composed of representatives of the donors, Partner Countries, UNHCR and other stakeholders. We are fully aware of the importance of transparency in Programme's implementation and clear responsibilities in the process.

We would like to reiterate once again the importance that we attach to the success of the Donors' Conference, since this is a final collective effort to close the chapter of the refugee population from 1991-1995 in the region. Therefore on behalf of four countries, I would like to use this opportunity to invite all participating states to support this important regional effort and to participate at the forthcoming Donors' Conference in Sarajevo. The successful implementation of this Programme will no doubt contribute to the consolidation of peace and stability in our region.

Thank you!