

STATEMENT
by H.E. Dr. Ashot Hovakimian
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
at the 69th session of the Executive Committee of the High
Commissioner's Programme (Excom)
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Excellencies,
 Dear colleagues,
 Ladies and Gentlemen,

Back in 2016 in New York the UN General Assembly held a high-level meeting and adopted a Declaration addressing the issues of large movements of refugees and migrants, which indicated the growing prominence of that problem on the global agenda. Armenia strongly supports the Global Compacts for Refugees and Migrants and believes that the Comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) can become an important guidance for further implementation of collective commitments towards refugees.

We are pleased to note that both Global Compacts truly reflect the holistic 360degree approach with forward looking and action oriented commitments. These commitments and actions will enable us to strengthen international cooperation on protection of human rights. This is the time to translate our political commitments embodied in the SDGs into actions. Today the overall situation in the world is complicated with the current humanitarian issues arising from the migration crisis. Those issues are triggering serious political implications and challenges.

Armenia has repeatedly expressed its serious concern over the crisis in Syria and the security of our compatriots in this country. Armenia is ready to continue and expand the humanitarian mission aimed at addressing the urgent needs of the Syrian Armenian community. Batches of humanitarian aid were dispatched and distributed in Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia, Kesab and other war torn regions of Syria.

The Government has taken an open approach and is offering several protection options as well as a set of benefits to persons displaced from Syria, including accelerated asylum-procedures, facilitated naturalization and residence permits. The State provides durable housing, free medical assistance and scholarships, supports them in setting up businesses taking into account their high entrepreneurial skills.

In committing to the realization of the ambitious 2030 Agenda Member States recognized that the Agenda's goals and targets should be met for all nations and people and for all segments of the society, with a pledge to not leaving any one behind.

SDG Goal 4 of 2030 agenda is aimed at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. In this regard the Government of Armenia is taking practical steps. In December 2015 the Parliament of Armenia has approved amendments to the Law "On Refugees and Asylum" to bring its provisions in conformity with European standards. These amendments ensure equal access for all asylum seekers and migrants to education by granting them the same rights as prescribed for Armenian citizens. From 2012-2016 the Ministry of Diaspora has received 2500 applications from Syrian students. The applications of Syrian migrants and refugees to all levels of education are being processed in an expedited manner (400 kindergarten and 2000 school applications have been processed).

The aim of SDG Goal 8 of 2030 agenda is to promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth full and productive employment and decent work for all. To this end all the doctors amongst Syrian refugees and migrants are registered in the database of the Ministry of Health in Armenia. The Government of Armenia has taken steps to provide work opportunities for 80 doctors from Syria in hospitals thus making this process mutually beneficial and reinforcing on the one hand migrants are provided with a decent work; on the other hand they are investing their knowledge and skills in the field of healthcare of our country. 2000 migrant have been provided with job opportunities in different fields. Armenian government has

provided various support packages and as a result over 100 business plans have been developed jointly with migrants.

Our country has also undertaken effective steps to reduce statelessness, whereby about 85.000 stateless persons have acquired citizenship of the Republic of Armenia. Moreover, with the assistance of the UNHCR the Law on Stateless Persons has been drafted, setting up the rights and obligations of stateless persons and regulating statelessness determination procedures.

Given the country's socio-economic situation and the lack of substantial foreign help, the influx of refugees to Armenia represents a serious challenge for the country. Notwithstanding the mentioned achievements, challenges remain in addressing the needs of new arrivals, of the most vulnerable among the displaced and in finding durable housing solutions and long term employment and income sources. Thus, it is important to maintain a sufficient level of support by UNHCR and other international partners to transform the immediate emergency humanitarian response measures into longer-term efforts aiming at durable solutions.

The refugee and migrant crises around the world are serious but not insurmountable. Our own experience tells us that the humanitarian situations of this magnitude require concerted efforts and cannot be solved by any one state alone. Our responses to large movements of people should be grounded in our common values of equitable responsibility sharing, non-discrimination and respect for human rights. We also strongly believe that the plight of refugees and the humanitarian response in addressing challenges associated with unprecedented numbers of refugees and displaced people should by no means become subject to political trade-offs and manipulations.

Armenia is in the strong opinion that the international community must take decisive steps to develop early warning and, more important, early action mechanism, to combat impunity in order to prevent mass exoduses and displacement. We believe not only in the primary importance of early warning but also the need to address root-causes of the existing problems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year we marked the 30th anniversary of anti-Armenian mass killings and pogroms in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait. The first group of refugees from Azerbaijan arrived in Armenia in March 1988. The 480 thousand refugees from Azerbaijan, who escaped atrocities, formed the first wave of refugees in the former Soviet Union. Ethnic cleansing was the prime cause of the influx of refugees and displaced persons who first came to Armenia.

The Azerbaijani aggression in April 2016 proved that the ultimate right – the right to life of the people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) is still threatened by Azerbaijan. The aggression resulted in a number of casualties among civilians and another wave of displacement.

Armenia highly appreciates the support and assistance by UNHCR to the displaced families as a result of the Azerbaijani aggression in April 2016 (over 2000 individuals fled to Armenia from Talish, Mardakert, Martuni and Hadrut). As a result of continued violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms by Azerbaijan the NK people face constant risk of displacement. Efforts should be made to facilitate humanitarian access of the UNHCR and the UN treaty bodies to the displaced population in the NK conflict area.

Thank you