

Statement for the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Seventy-fourth Session

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Distinguished Delegates,

Mr. High Commissioner,

At the outset, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to you and your Office's vital assistance to forcibly displaced people worldwide.

These efforts are of critical importance, especially against the background of new waves of mass displacement in different regions of the world, which has exceeded 110 million this year. In this context, we note with appreciation the endeavors of UNHCR to alleviate the plight of forcefully displaced persons from Ukraine in search of safety in the wake of Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine.

At this point, Georgia has received and is supporting more than 27 000 war-affected Ukrainians. The Government implements special care projects and provides them with accommodation, schooling and healthcare services. They are also given the opportunity to use a number of similar services that the Government provides to the internally displaced Georgian citizens from the Russia-occupied regions of Georgia.

Mr. High Commissioner,

In recent years, Georgia has implemented significant reforms aimed at ensuring the protection of those, who have been forcibly displaced. The Law of Georgia on International Protection, which is in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol, specifies principles and strengthens procedural safeguards at all stages of the asylum procedure and guarantees special procedures for persons with specific needs. While guaranteeing their safe stay in Georgia, asylum-seekers, refugees and humanitarian status holders benefit from several social programmes.

Ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), in June this year, the MFA of Georgia and the UNHCR representation in Georgia co-hosted 'Georgia Refugee Forum', focusing on 'all of society' approach to refugee protection and integration, with the participation of contributing Governmental institutions, international organizations, NGOs, universities and private sector. The Forum presented an opportunity to reflect on the progress of pledges made by Georgia during the Global Refugee Forum in 2019. Other positive initiatives and achievements that support refugee inclusion and integration were also highlighted.

Furthermore, in the frameworks of fulfilment of these pledges, in 2022, the Government of Georgia hosted several delegations to share the experience and knowledge within the scope of Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG), notably on issues of establishing refugee status determination (RSD) procedures, country of origin (COI) research capacity and quality assurance mechanism. Here again, we express our interest and commitment for being actively involved in the work of the ACSG by receiving and sharing experience on asylum issues and would like to note with appreciation the existing fruitful cooperation with the UNHCR.

Dear delegates,

As of today, close to 300 000 IDPs are registered in Georgia, who have been expelled from the Russia-occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, as a result of several waves of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Russian Federation since 1991. Therefore, protecting the rights of IDPs and providing them with decent living conditions until they are able to return to their houses remains among the top priorities of the Government. To address different needs, there are number of ongoing programs aimed at providing durable social services and housing solutions for IDP families.

Despite our efforts, the humanitarian and human rights situation in the Russia-occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia continues to deteriorate. In the absolute absence of international monitoring mechanisms on the ground, Russia's ongoing occupation and militarization of Georgia's occupied regions, continue to severely affect the everyday lives of people living therein and pose an imminent threat of the new wave of forced displacement.

In this light, we are deeply concerned with the recent statements by Russia's occupation regime regarding the deployment of a Russian military naval base in Georgia's occupied Abkhazia region and the inclusion of the indivisible Abkhazia region in the integration processes initiated by Russia, which yet again demonstrate Russia's ongoing aggressive policy against Georgia. These acts are blatant violation of international law and fundamental UN principles and a gross violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.

In this regard, let me recall the judgements of the ECHR (*on the case of GEORGIA v. RUSSIA (II) from January 2021 and on the case of "Mamasakhlisi and Others v. Georgia and Russia" from March, 2023*), which legally established the responsibility of Russia - the authority exercising effective control over the occupied regions of Georgia - for the human rights violations, including for the violation of the right of IDPs and refugees to return to their homes and concluded that it is an obligation of Russia to enable forcefully displaced population to return to their homes. Moreover, the ICC decision of 2022 on issuing arrest warrants for individuals bearing criminal responsibility for the war crimes committed during 2008 Russia-Georgia war, also illustrates the above-mentioned.

We urge the Russian Federation to fulfill its international obligations and responsibilities to comply with the EU-mediated 2008 Ceasefire Agreement, allow international security and human rights mechanisms on the ground, cease the grave human rights violations therein and ensure safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their homes of origin.

In this context, effective continuation and achievement of tangible results within the Geneva International Discussions (GID) - which is the only format with the Russian Federation for addressing the issues related to implementation of Russia's international obligations, including return of the IDPs and refugees to their homes in safety and dignity - is of particular importance.

In this regard, I would like to once again stress the important role of the UNHCR in the humanitarian Working Group of the GID.

Georgia stands committed to ensuring that voices of the IDPs heard and their fundamental right to safe and dignified return to their homes in fulfilled.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Georgia's full support to the UNHCR's dedicated work and tireless efforts to support millions of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced, and stateless persons worldwide.

I thank you.