

74TH SESSION OF THE UNHCR EXCOM

Item 3: GENERAL DEBATE

Statement by MONTENEGRO

as delivered by H.E. Ambassador Slavica Milačić, Permanent Representative of Montenegro to the UN and other IOs in Geneva

Geneva, 9 October 2023

Madam Chair,
Mr. High Commissioner,
Excellences, Dear colleagues,

Montenegro thanks the High Commissioner Grandi for his sober address. We reiterate our appreciation for his able leadership and commend him and the staff of UNHCR for their dedicated engagement and important work in the field.

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is a right moment to recall its far-sighted vision. And to re-embrace and re-enforce its forward-looking principles of equality and non-discrimination. As well as its broad range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to be universally protected, including the right to seek and enjoy asylum and the right to protection against arbitrary displacement. Setting out, for the first time, these key principles, this landmark document provided the basis for the 1951 Refugee Convention and the development of international refugee and human rights law more broadly.

This is also the year in which, regrettably, we are faced with increased intensity and prevalence of armed conflicts and violence worldwide, and with exponentially growing and complex humanitarian crises. A year of unfolding emergencies that seize the world's attention.

Year after year, we witness a growing number of civilians compelled to flee from persecution, conflicts, and gross violations of international human rights law and

international humanitarian law. Besides, the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are more intense and frequent, contributing to forced displacement. So we have reached a new record of 108 million forcibly displaced persons, of which 34 million are refugees.

The above is supported by the fact that the UNHCR Office was faced with 35 emergencies in 25 countries that were marked by conflicts, violence, economic hardship, often exacerbating existing vulnerabilities related to poverty and discrimination on various grounds.

On top of that, we are now well into the second year of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which continues to inflict heavy civilian casualties and large-scale deliberate destruction in the country, further deepening one of the world's fastest-growing displacement. And global food instability, economic and energy crises.

Mr. High Commissioner,

With this geopolitical context and adverse developments, more and more countries are facing serious challenges, further deepening the complexity of protecting those who are forced to flee or stateless. As the gap between the necessities of persons in need of protection and the financial resources provided is growing, we welcome UNHCR's increased emphasis on building further partnerships and cooperation in order to mobilize resources for the displaced and host countries.

To efficiently address these challenges, we also endorse the calls for strong commitment to achieve a greater burden- and-responsibility sharing, with an increased sense of solidarity, cooperation and partnerships.

Mr. High Commissioner,

As a country that for decades has demonstrated its strong solidarity and humanity towards the plight of people who were forced to leave their homes and countries,

Montenegro was one of the first to provide shelter to mass refugee's influx from Ukraine.

The UNHCR's Global Trends report shows that Montenegro is at the top of the countries in terms of the share of Ukrainian refugees in the total Montenegro's population. For a sense of the scope and burden of Montenegro, allow me to refer to the same source of statistics and indicate that, depending on the length of stay in Montenegro, Ukrainian refugees can make up to 5% of the country's population.

Currently, about 4,300 Ukrainians are staying in Montenegro under temporary protection, compared to about 9,400 since the beginning of the Russian aggression.

Mr. High Commissioner,

Montenegro remains committed to build an effective national system for the international protection of persons in need, based on relevant international standards and instruments for the reception, protection and integration of these persons into an inclusive Montenegrin society.

In this regard, allow me to briefly highlight only some aspects of activities and achievements, especially with the aim of keeping the asylum and migration management system operational, and effectively addressing the issue of displaced persons and statelessness.

As for the strategic framework, the implementation of the 2022-2023 Roadmap of cooperation between Montenegro and European Agency for Asylum (EUAA) continued, as well as the Strategy for Migration and Reintegration of Returnees for the 2021-2025. The end result should be enhanced protection of refugees and asylum seekers and improved accommodation capacities.

Furthermore, the legal deadline for deciding on the granting of temporary protection has been reduced to six months; work is being done on the expansion

of accommodation capacities for the reception of asylum seekers, with a special focus on vulnerable groups; persons under temporary protection are also provided with free legal aid, which is implemented through the UNHCR program in cooperation with the local NGO "Civil Alliance". Psychosocial and medical help is also available to these people.

In the field of statelessness, among other things, amendments to the Law on Foreigners introduced the statelessness determination procedure (SDP) into the legal system.

At the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness of the UNHCR EXCOM, Montenegro undertook obligations related to the prevention and reduction of statelessness, which both at the strategic and operational levels have served as guidelines for further action in accordance with international conventions and standards in this area. And this is related to: the implementation of simplified procedures for obtaining identification documents through cooperation with the respective countries of origin; the entry in the birth register of children abandoned by their mothers or whose mothers do not have identification documents; exchange of experiences in the prevention of statelessness; strengthening of institutions for the implementation of the procedure for determining the status of stateless persons, the harmonization of national legislation, and providing access to rights for persons granted the status of stateless persons.

Mr. High Commissioner,

Montenegro welcomes the progress made across the UNHCR's transformative agenda and remains a resolute supporter of the UNHCR's work and mandate.

Finally, looking ahead to the second Global Refugee Forum, we share your views on the importance of coming together with a human rights-focused approach and a strong humanitarian spirit in global support for people who have been forced to flee and leave everything behind. Thank you.