

75TH SESSION OF THE UNHCR EXCOM

Item 3: HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT ON STATELESSNESS AND 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, 15 October 2024

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

Montenegro aligns with the statement of the European Union.

Montenegro thanks High Commissioner Grandi for his insightful overview of the pressing humanitarian and refugee needs globally, marked by unprecedented forced displacement that is growing exponentially even as we speak. We reiterate our sincere appreciation for his able leadership and continued committed work of UNHCR staff on the ground, who operate in difficult and often insecure environment but still find ways to reach the most vulnerable. It is critical that UNHCR retains ability to deliver on its mandate of life-saving protection and assistance.

Mr. High Commissioner, as you detailed, the scale and complexity of displacement emergencies is staggering. With an average of 40 emergencies each year for the last three years, currently reaching a record 123 million refugees and displaced persons, of whom 47 million are children. Conflicts, violence, and persecution remain the main drivers, further compounded by climate change as displacement multipliers and economic hardship in the countries of origin, transit, and hosts. These are precisely the contexts that generate mixed flows where refugees and

migrants move side by side on the same routes, as well as protracted displacement. On the current trajectory, your estimates speak of 140 million forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the next year.

You have also pointed to the patterns of conflict in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and now Lebanon, which bring the observance of international humanitarian law to an unacceptably low point. Indeed, unless we renew our collective commitment to protecting civilians as a legal obligation and uphold the related accountabilities, wars will grow even more deadly and devastating.

In the year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, we are even more obliged to recommit ourselves to compliance with international humanitarian law and accountability for its violations.

Montenegro will continue to strongly advocate for the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers who should never be targeted and the facilitation of humanitarian access, in line with the obligations of all parties under international humanitarian law.

Madam Chair,

Montenegro welcomes UNHCR's work on route-based approaches, which are key in addressing the challenges of mixed movements. This is especially so given the significant support and investment required to build the capacities of host and transit countries and ensure compliance with international legal obligations.

We further welcome the UNCHR's sustainable programming initiative, promoting socio-economic inclusion, self-reliance and resilience for both displaced persons and host communities. To that, we continue to count on UNHCR's key role as a catalyst and coordinator between governments, donors, humanitarian and development agencies, as well as for facilitating private sector investment in displacement contexts.

[We greatly appreciate the consensual adoption of this year's ExCom Conclusions on durable solutions and complementary pathways under the rapporteur's guidance, to be endorsed at the ongoing session.]

Mr. High Commissioner,

Montenegro remains committed to constantly developing its national system for effective international protection of persons in need, under relevant international standards and international and regional instruments for hosting, protecting, and including them in Montenegrin society.

As one of the first countries to join the Global Alliance on Statelessness, we applaud its official launch.

At this point, allow me to briefly point to some of the key activities and achievements of Montenegro, especially in terms of fulfilling our pledges related to statelessness.

At the Global Refugee Forums held in Geneva in 2019 and 2023, Montenegro committed to improving its statelessness determination procedure (SDP) and providing access to socio-economic rights to stateless persons, as well as improving birth registration procedures and implementing simplified procedures for obtaining identification documents. Montenegro has also pledged to join global initiatives to eradicate statelessness and protect stateless persons. To date, we have met three out of seven pledges, while we continue our dedicated work to implement those remaining, in cooperation with UNHCR.

On that note, the National Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro 2021-2025 includes several activities to end statelessness. Furthermore, the amended Law on Foreigners, which will be adopted by the Parliament next month, will eliminate certain SDP's deficiencies. This will enable

better access to socio-economic rights for both those who initiate SDP and those who acquire stateless status.

Finally, this year Montenegro and Kosovo have successfully concluded a ten-year technical cooperation based on the Agreement from 2011 on the subsequent registration of internally displaced persons from Kosovo residing in Montenegro in the birth and citizenship registers of Kosovo. More than 1,370 people living in Montenegro, who fled to Montenegro as displaced persons at the end of the 1990s, received identity documents. This exemplary model of cooperation between the relevant institutions of Kosovo and Montenegro marks a significant milestone in solving issues related to displacement and statelessness.

It is also worth mentioning this year, the first person previously holding stateless status acquired Montenegrin citizenship.

At the end of September 2024, according to UNHCR field data, there are about 430 persons at risk of statelessness and 10 stateless persons residing in Montenegro. Most of them belong to the Roma and Egyptian communities, while more than half are children. The 2023 Population Census - the results of which have just been officially published, should also provide data on the number of stateless persons residing in Montenegro.

Mr. High Commissioner,

As we have entered the third year of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, in July this year, the Parliament of Montenegro amended the Law on International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners, providing the legal ground for endless extension of TP regime.

Finally, looking ahead to 2025, when UNHCR will celebrate its 75th birthday, Montenegro reiterates its strong support for UNHCR's mandate to protect and assist all those in need.