

The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

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Excellencies,

At the outset, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the High Commissioner and his Office for their tireless work in providing assistance to forcibly displaced people worldwide. These efforts are of critical importance, especially against the background of increasing number of forced displacement, which reached a staggering amount of 120 million people this year.

Raging conflicts in different parts of the world, including the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, continue to exacerbate the already dire situation of displacement, affecting around 1.5% of the world's population.

Since the start of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, Georgia has received and has been supporting more than 28 000 war-affected Ukrainians. We continue our efforts to alleviate the plight of Ukrainians, who were forced to flee their homes. The Government implements special care projects and also provides them with accommodation, schooling and healthcare services.

Mr. High Commissioner,

Let me briefly highlight some recent steps made by the Government of Georgia for protection of those, who have been forcibly displaced.

At the Global Refugee Forum last year, Georgia undertook pledges to further improve its national legislation related to international protection and integration of asylum seekers. In line with these commitments, the Government provides international legal and socio-economic guarantees to persons under international protection, as well as services for social assistance, health care, education, employment. Georgia also actively implements a state integration program. In cooperation with the UNHCR Office in Georgia, the capabilities of the Integration Centers have been increased, enabling provision of the on-site service delivery in regional areas for the first time.

Herewith, I would like to use the opportunity to welcome the launching of the **Global Alliance to End Statelessness**. During the first Global Refugee Forum, back in 2019, in the frames of the **#IBelong Campaign**, Georgia made pledges to tackle statelessness. To this end, Georgia has already successfully fulfilled a number of reforms, such as reducing the period of residence for the naturalization of stateless, as well as reducing the service fee for issuing an electronic residence permit for the stateless status holders; abolishing the service fee for stateless status determination procedure; granting the right of the emergency care of the State Universal Healthcare Program and free legal aid by the state funded agency. Besides, the service fee for granting Georgian citizenship to stateless persons under regular procedure has been abolished.

Distinguished Delegates,

As we speak now, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons who have been expelled from the Russia-occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, as a result of several waves of ethnic cleansing, still continue to be deprived of their fundamental right to return to their homes. Therefore, the Government of Georgia continues to prioritize protection of the rights of IDPs. Our policies and programs are aimed at providing them with decent living conditions as well as durable social services and housing solutions for IDP families.

Allow me to draw to your attention the continuously deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia occupied by Russia. We witness pronounced violations of human rights and basic freedoms on the ground, which severely affect the everyday lives of people residing therein and pose an imminent threat of the new wave of forced displacement. Among other gross infringements, ethnic discrimination of Georgians continues to take a heavy toll on conflict-affected people. Last year only, Russian occupation has claimed lives of two more peaceful Georgian civilians (Tamaz Ginturi and Temur Karbaia).

It remains alarming that despite the gravity of the situation in the Russia-occupied regions of Georgia, the access of the OHCHR and other international human rights mechanisms to these regions is continuously denied by the Russian Federation - the power exercising effective control on the ground and bearing full responsibility for grave human rights violations therein - as it has been confirmed by the decisions of ECHR and ICC.

We reiterate our call upon Russian Federation 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 and ensure safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their homes.

In this context, let me underline the particular importance of the Geneva International Discussions, as the unique format to make due pressure on Russia to ensure implementation of its international obligations. Regrettably, due to the continued disruptive actions by Russia, no progress has been achieved on one of the core issues of the GID - return of the IDPs and refugees to their homes in safety and dignity. Here, I would like to once again stress the important role of the UNHCR in the humanitarian Working Group of the GID.

To conclude with, I would like to reiterate Georgia's full support to the UNHCR's vital work to address the pressing challenges faced by millions of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced, and stateless persons in different parts of the world.

I thank you.