

"Towards a global compact on refugees"
Thematic discussion 4
Measures to be taken in pursuit of solutions
Statement by Serbia

We are pleased to be part of the discussions of an active and transparent process which will contribute to a better understanding of the subject-matter and the formulation of proposals concerning the Global Compact on Refugees. Besides providing emergency assistance to refugees, we consider it essential to work on reaching sustainable and durable solutions, bearing in mind that the numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons are increasing on a daily basis.

We have seen that there are no simple or administrative solutions to the refugee problem. Additional efforts of the international community are needed in order to deal with this problem effectively. For this reason, we are ready to contribute to the Global Compact on Refugees by sharing our experiences, both with regard to the challenges of protracted displacement, and with regard to the best practices in addressing the displacement problem.

The Republic of Serbia has gained experience in sheltering persons forced to leave their homes long before the current refugee crisis set in. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990-ties have found refuge in Serbia, as well as more than 200 thousand IDP's who were expelled from Kosovo and Metohija in 1999.

Today we would like to highlight the Regional Housing Programme which is a joint initiative by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. The aim of the Programme is to contribute to the resolution of the protracted displacement situation of the most vulnerable refugees and displaced persons following the 1991-1995 conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia. It is implemented by the four countries in cooperation with UNHCR, EU, OSCE, Council of Europe Development Bank and other partners and donors.

The Programme can serve as a good example of cooperation between host countries and countries of origin of refugees. In addition to its humanitarian dimension, the Programme plays an important role in the process of reconciliation and development of good-neighbourly relations in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. It is highly important that all countries participating in the Programme, including the Republic of Croatia, fully implement the Regional Housing Programme and the Sarajevo Process, so as to ensure viable conditions for returnees, as well as their full reintegration. It is also

important to work on the Programme's sustainability, where UNHCR plays an irreplaceable role.

Although this model has a great potential, as an example of action taken by all stakeholders in circumstances of protracted displacement, we believe that future similar programmes should be more ambitious and, in addition to housing and technical aspects, take into consideration a bigger picture and foresee additional criteria and measures aimed at creating and facilitating the living conditions of returnees, in terms of providing conditions for their safe and sustainable return, including monitoring and a stronger role of the international community, especially UNHCR.

Experience has shown that refugees and returnees from Croatia have been facing and continue to face serious obstacles in the exercise of tenancy/occupancy rights and pension entitlements, issues related to restoration of houses and agricultural land, use of language and script, employment in state institutions, etc. That is why the Republic of Serbia has not accepted the UNHCR recommendation, of April 2014, on the status cessation for refugees coming from Croatia displaced in 1992-1995, which will enter into force in January 2018. The recommendation was adopted too soon and without consultation with all the parties concerned. Such an approach should be avoided in the future.

Statistics reflect that the number of IDPs in the world by far exceeds the number of refugees. We consider it important that UNHCR and other international organizations relevant for the protection of forcibly displaced persons, take appropriate measures aimed at addressing the problem of IDPs, bearing in mind that the challenges they face are identical to those facing refugees. In this context, we wish to recall that after 18 years of international presence in Kosovo and Metohija, out of a total of more than 200,000 IDPs less than 5000 have had a sustainable return. We hope that in cooperation with the UNHCR and other relevant actors, we will all be able to do more in this and similar cases in terms of seeking and finding just and durable solutions for IDPs.