

Azerbaijan

Distinguished Madam Chair! Distinguished Mr. High Commissioner!
Excellences! Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the Government of Azerbaijan I would like to thank High Commissioner for his thought-provoking opening statement, which clearly illustrates present global challenges the UN Refugee Agency, as well as the whole international community, have to face in order to respond to urgent humanitarian needs and large-scale forcible displacement caused by wars, conflicts, persecution, violation of human rights and climate change across the continents. I am confident that the results of this session will be useful for the work and joint efforts to improve the state of refugees and IDPs.

Unfortunately, despite the goal we set in our Global Agenda for 2030 to reduce internal displacement by at least 50 per cent, each year we face an unprecedented number of the displaced, which exceeds now 100 million according to UNHCR. As the High Commissioner noted in his most recent report, today Europe faces the largest refugee crisis ever since the World War II. The humanity reached the moment when the doubled, even tripled efforts for prevention and solution are an absolute and urgent necessity. In this regard, I would like to express our support for the UN Secretary-General's timely Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, which highlighted internal displacement not only as a humanitarian problem, but also as a priority for development and peace.

Azerbaijan's sensitivities towards displacement problem are clearly understandable as a country that has been hosting, in per capita terms, one of the highest caseloads of the forcibly displaced in the world in the last three decades, comprising ten percent of country's population of 10 million. Azerbaijan has gained enormous experience and knowledge base in dealing with a large-scale displacement. To-date, 116 new modern residential complexes have been erected in the country, 320,000 refugees and IDPs have been provided with improved housing, poverty level among IDPs has dropped from 75 percent to 8. However, notwithstanding an exemplary care and attention rendered towards the displaced by national authorities, the only durable solution to the protracted displacement (as stated also in the reports of UN Special Rapporteur on human rights of IDPs) was closely linked to the political settlement of the former conflict in the territory of Azerbaijan and liberation of its territories occupied by Armenia that would have enabled IDPs to exercise their fundamental right to return – in safety, dignity and voluntarily. For almost 30 years, Armenia has kept 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory under occupation, not complying with 1993 UN Security Council resolutions demanding 'full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan'. However, Azerbaijan's victory in a 44-day Patriotic War of 2020 put an end to a 30-year old standing conflict, and not only reinstated territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders, but also created conditions conducive for safe, dignified and voluntary return of hundreds of thousands of our compatriots to their homeland.

At present, the Azerbaijani state has an honorable task to ensure restoration, sustainable development of liberated territories, and return and reintegration of IDPs to their permanent places of residence. Currently, security measures are being undertaken and a number of significant infrastructure projects implemented in the liberated territories. "Smart village" and "Smart city" projects are given priority in reconstruction works, and I am pleased to note that the first wave of returnees has moved back already to their homes in Zangelan (70 families) this summer.

Great Return of IDPs, along with reintegration of liberated areas into the national economy, has been declared as one out of five national priorities for socio-economic development of Azerbaijan to be achieved by 2030. The draft Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On repatriation and reintegration to the liberated territories" has been also developed.

At the same time, I would like to emphasize that Armenia has contaminated a large amount of Azerbaijani lands with mines and other unexploded ordnances to the extent that today, according to international experts, this area is considered to be one of the most mine-polluted areas on the Earth. By refusing to hand over accurate mine maps in full, Armenia grossly violates fundamental human rights, especially the right to life. Massive landmines in these areas negatively affect the exercise of an inalienable right of hundreds of thousands of IDPs to return to their homes in a safe and dignified manner. More than 250 Azerbaijanis have been killed or injured by mines in the liberated territories since 2020. IDPs who have been looking forward to seeing their homeland for 30 years are also among them.

Despite such serious challenges as severe mine-contamination and total destruction of the infrastructure, we are confident that with concerted efforts of international community, in the coming few years Azerbaijan will be in a position to present a new model of post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration of the displaced persons, and will convert lands liberated from occupation, once abandoned and devastated, into a place of prosperity and fortune. Restoring justice for IDPs is a solid foundation for any long-term peace and stability in the region, and from that

perspective an end of this long-standing conflict means restoration of basic fundamental rights of IDPs who have been human face of this tragedy.

Mr. High Commissioner,

The Government of Azerbaijan and UNHCR enjoy solid and productive cooperation, based on the common goal to provide protection and adequate assistance to IDPs, refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons. Azerbaijan is a strong supporter of the mandate and work of UNHCR. My country is making serious efforts to fulfill its international commitments on migration and refugee issues in the spirit of a fair and constructive collaboration. We remain committed to work with UNHCR on the effective local integration of refugees. New policy measures have been introduced to allow easier access of refugees and asylum seekers to labor market, compulsory health insurance system and other basic services, so as to ensure durable and effective solutions. Azerbaijan has successfully completed implementation of the pledges voiced by the Government at the First Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in 2019, and continues to take relevant measures for achieving its commitments made at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. The Government of Azerbaijan recognizes the crucial times we live through, marked with a number of serious challenges such as pandemic, wars, climate change and unprecedented forceful migration flows, which affect all of us. We believe that only a genuine international effort towards adhering to the accepted international commitments, mutual respect and awareness of responsibility before future generations can produce just solutions to these problems, and Azerbaijan is committed to playing its role in this global process.

Thank you for your attention.***