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Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
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Mr. Chairperson,

Forced displacement of people in the OSCE area due to unresolved conflicts is one of the most acute problems requiring urgent actions by the OSCE and its participating States. In the face of existing set of OSCE commitments on refugees and IDPs, it is very relevant to discuss the needs of this vulnerable group and review challenges to implement existing commitments, within the HDIM.

Azerbaijan has been coping with refugee and IDPs problem for more than twenty years due to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Close to one million Azerbaijanis had been expelled from Armenia *per se* and the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Protection of this vulnerable group, including addressing their social problems and restoration of their rights and freedoms is a priority of the Government of Azerbaijan.

Nevertheless, the only durable and long-lasting solution to the issue can be achieved through ensuring the inalienable right to return to their habitual residence of displaced population, in conformity with international norms and OSCE commitments. As all participating States agreed in Lisbon Summit (1996) to “...facilitate return, in safety and in dignity, of refugees and IDPs, according to international standards”, our discussions here should focus on practical implementation of this commitment and highlight concrete measures aimed at overcoming obstacles to such return. In this context, we consistently underlined the urgency of withdrawal of occupying forces and comprehensive rehabilitation of the occupied territories.

Moreover, assuring the right of return also constitutes a categorical rejection of the results of ethnic cleansing and offers an important measure of justice to those displaced from their homes and thereby removing a source of possible future tension and conflict.

It is of concern that, despite the absence of specific OSCE commitments, there are attempts to use the notion of “rights of people residing in conflict zones” as the compensation for the inclusion of topic on “Refugees and displaced persons” to the agenda of HDIM. It should be underlined that, no right can be exercised at the expense of the violation of other’s rights, and such a discriminatory approach based on the denial of fundamental rights and freedoms of population expelled from conflict zones should be rejected.

In light of the above-mentioned, we call on all OSCE participating States, as well as OSCE executive structures to pay close attention to the issue of protection of refugees and IDPs and to take into due account the needs of this vulnerable group in their future activities.

Thank you.