



OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

**Address by Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia,  
at the conference “Local Integration of Refugees”  
Sava Centre, Belgrade, 22 October 2007**

Minister Ljajic, Commissioner Dabetic, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Closing the so-called refugee file in the region is one of the core tasks of the OSCE Mission.

Minister Ljajic referred in his opening statement to the necessity to balance integration with a real possibility of return, linked to the so called Sarajevo process and the need to conclude this soon. In asking for international assistance in doing this, I can safely state that he has the strong support and commitment of the OSCE Mission to Serbia in this respect. But the main responsibility still rests upon the governments that signed this declaration, and without the strong commitment of all of these, it is difficult to see how we can succeed.

Because of its cross-border character, the refugee issue can only be resolved on a regional level. For that reason we cooperate closely with other OSCE Missions in the region, UNHCR and the European Commission Delegations, as well as with the governments involved, supporting governments in finding durable solutions for those who are for more than a decade displaced in the region.

One of the options is granting full and permanent asylum and integration into the host country of those who are unwilling or unable to return to their country of origin. And I underline that this is only one of the options.

When the displacement lasts for a considerable period of time, various factors influence refugees in making their decisions. What was once a prevailing wish to return often transforms into a prevailing wish to stay put and integrate.

Integration is a problem faced by refugees worldwide, including refugees living in Serbia. Return is not an easy process and unfortunately it has also proven not to be an early possibility.

International refugee conventions foresee that local integration is to take place through legal, economic, and social incorporation of refugees, culminating with the acquisition of citizenship.

Local integration is a two-way street. It's about helping refugees, but it's also about identifying solutions acceptable to host countries.

A precondition of successful integration is finding the delicate balance between the needs and constraints of host countries and those of refugees.

We say that refugees should strive to integrate successfully into their host society. But they are more likely to succeed, if they are welcomed by host societies and be enabled to use their resources and skills.

Governments, politicians, political parties, the media and educational institutions – they all have a role to play in strengthening solidarity with those who are victims of the past wars in the region.

We are here today to share with you findings of the analysis of the legal framework and practices in regard to the process of local integration of refugees in Serbia. This analysis has been jointly elaborated by the OSCE Mission to Serbia, UNHCR, and the Humanitarian Centre for Integration and Tolerance from Novi Sad.

We note positive developments and efforts by the government of Serbia, especially in amending its citizenship legislation so to enable easier acquisition of citizenship by the refugee population. We also see areas where stronger engagement by the government is needed. Also essential is support from bilateral donors to accelerate solutions providing access to all rights, particularly housing.

We hope that the presentation today of this comprehensive review of the process of local integration of refugees in Serbia will lead to a fruitful discussion among all relevant stakeholders. We look forward to seeing concrete steps taken to expedite this process.

Thank you for your attention.