



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

2011 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 26 September to 07 October 2011

**Mrs. Svetlana Velimirović, Deputy Commissioner
Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia**

Working session 11:

Humanitarian issues and other commitments I, including:

- Migrant workers, the integration of legal migrants;
- **Refugees and displaced persons;**
- Treatment of citizens of other participating States;
- Citizenship and political rights;
- Democracy at the national, regional and local level

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here today and for being able to share with you some of the most pressing and current information on the development of the refugee and IDP situation in Serbia.

For the past twenty years, the Republic of Serbia has been expending efforts at both the national and regional level to provide durable solutions for refugees. In 2010, at the regional Ministerial conference held in Belgrade, the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia have reaffirmed their readiness to find a solution for the protracted refugee situation that is still affecting these countries. After seventeen months of intensive bilateral and regional meetings the respective governments have adopted a joint project outline aimed at resolving the housing needs of approximately 74,000 displaced persons within the region. A Ministerial conference that will reaffirm our commitment is expected to take place by the end of the year in Belgrade, and will be followed by a donor conference intended to establish the multi donor trust fund. While the project targets only the most vulnerable families, it can be regarded as a milestone of the refugee chapter for countries of the former Yugoslavia. We are exceptionally grateful to the international community for their vital support in achieving this important goal.

However, it is important to emphasize that the regional project does not address the pressing needs of the IDPs originating from Kosovo and Metohija. Currently there are 210.000 IDPs residing within Serbia and that number is at risk of increasing. The Republic of Serbia is fully committed to resolving the still pending IDP issues and is doing everything in its capacities to implement the UN Guiding Principles on internal Displacement and Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs.

The National Strategy for Resolving Problems of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons for the Period from 2011 to 2014 adopted by our

Government earlier this year provides a set of strategic measures for the resolution of these matters. In the past three years, implementation mechanisms have been established at the local level and I would like to express our gratitude, in particularly to the OSCE, as well as to other international organizations, for providing us with the needed support in this undertaking.

In spite of these efforts, we should keep in mind that, as stated in the Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs, real progress can only be achieved if IDPs can fully exercise their property rights, both in their current and former place of residence. In other words, they must have a real and free choice between return and integration.

The conditions for return are grounded in access to property rights, security, and the enjoyment of freedoms and rights in the place of origin. After many years of international administration, these conditions still do not exist in Kosovo and Metohija, making the return process slow and unsustainable. According to data the number of returnees to Kosovo and Metohija amounts to 19,600, but only 20% of this number can be classified as sustainable return.

With all of this in mind, I feel compelled to draw your attention to the most recent developments regarding the support for IDPs. Last month we were informed of the UNHCR decision to drastically reduce its presence and programming in the Republic of Serbia for the year 2012, due to the overall financial constraints. At the same time, the recent Joint needs assessment of IDPs in Serbia, which was conducted in cooperation with the UNHCR demonstrates that the needs of IDPs remain extremely high. In the absence of the required support, significant activities and programs aimed at providing assistance to IDPs will be reduced, a decision that will impact a great number of displaced persons in Serbia.

Republic of Serbia notes with concern the emerging refugee crises in the world and commends the efforts of the international community to provide protection to those in need. At the same time, we firmly believe that the needs of

the 210.000 IDPs who have been displaced since 1999 can not be left unanswered. Significant results have been achieved and they remain to be achieved within the regional project. However, the questions of displacement and IDP concerns in the Republic of Serbia remain and in order to resolve these, we need the continuous assistance of the international community.