



ARMENIA

SEPTEMBER 30, 2015

UN HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON “STRENGTHENING COOPERATION ON MIGRATION AND REFUGEE MOVEMENTS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEW DEVELOPMENT AGENDA”

STATEMENT BY THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

Mr. Secretary-General,

On behalf of Armenia's Delegation, I would like to commend your leadership and thank you and your team for putting together this high-level meeting on “Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements in the perspective of the new development agenda”. We want to express our appreciation to the distinguished panel and speakers for their contributions.

Armenia has constantly been committed to resolving issues that refugees and migrants face being a party to the Convention on the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Protocol to the Status of Refugees of 1967, Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and a member of UNHCR Executive Committee. We have close to a quarter of a century of productive close cooperation with UNHCR and IOM, and highly value their work and projects around the world.

The phenomenon of migration is unfortunately not novelty for the Armenian people. We have seen migration and refugees as a result of deportation and the first genocide of the 20th century. At the end of the 20th century Armenian people living in Azerbaijan once again became a victim of the policy of hatred, discrimination and extermination. After the state-sponsored and organized massacres of peaceful population in Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad and elsewhere, Armenians had to flee from Azerbaijan, forcing hundreds of thousands of Armenians to quit their homes, becoming refugees and internally displaced persons, trying simply to stay alive. These racist actions of Azerbaijani government have made it crystal clear - it has no political, legal, humanitarian and moral right to blame Armenia or any other country for its existing and non-existing problems involving refugees and IDPs. It is well-known and properly documented that it was Azerbaijan, which more than two decades ago, unleashed a full-scale war against Nagorno-Karabakh, with an intention of totally exterminating its Armenian population. The military aggression by Azerbaijan, however had an unpredictable consequences for itself.

It is our strong belief that primary responsibility for assisting refugees and IDPs, irrespective of the cause, rests with the national government. However, when the government is unwilling or unable to provide the necessary aid to its affected population, the international humanitarian community must step in. International community should also condemn all attempts of politicising the issues of refugees and migrants at national and international levels, denounce the policy and practice by the government of Azerbaijan to distort facts on refugees and IDPs by exaggerating figures and juggling with statistical data contained in the official reports of relevant international institutions, including first and foremost those of UNHCR.

Had the leadership of Azerbaijan been sincere and really interested in finding solution for its refugees and IDPs it would have done so in the past two decades. Instead of channeling its budget, which is extensively fueled by petrodollars, towards permanently resolving the issue, this country rather decided to exploit the issue and spend these petrodollars to purchase extremely large quantities of arms and military hardware.

Armenia has received around 600 thousand refugees in the end of 80s, early 90s from Azerbaijan. Most of them have been naturalized. Children of refugees and/or IDPs are automatically given Armenian citizenship. No Armenian refugee will be willing to return to their homes in Baku or Sumgait, where they will only have memories of their own neighbors trying to kill them. However, the Armenian refugees from Getashen, Shahumian, Artsvashen and other Armenian regions, that are currently under Azerbaijani occupation, are strongly dedicated to return to their homes, once their homeland returns to its lawful owners.

Mr. Secretary-General,

Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia has never politicized the issue and rather chosen to concentrate on finding sustainable solutions for affected populations. As a result of a full-scale refugee integration policy and a number of measures including the Social Housing Action Plan for 2011-2012, our refugees and IDPs have been provided increased access to housing, social and health services, education and employment - in partnership with international donors. Armenia observes with a deep concern the ongoing conflicts in the world impact on rise in global forced displacement.

With recent influx of refugees from Syria the Government of Armenia spares no efforts to meet their needs urgently adopting and implementing a comprehensive Action Plan in 2013. Unfortunately, Armenia has been the recipient of large numbers of refugees from Syria. This new wave of displacement adds to similar challenges already faced by Armenia, hosting and integrating of hundred thousands

of refugees from Azerbaijan and a few thousand displaced not so long ago from Iraq.

Around 16 thousand refugees from Syria have found second home now in Armenia and the Government is doing its utmost to accommodate them and alleviate their problems. In this connection the work of the UNHCR Armenia office has to be highly commended. It plays an immensely important role in alleviating the Syrian refugee crisis in Armenia. Every refugee arriving in Armenia from Syria, is basically guaranteed to have almost every right of the citizens of Armenia, including that of freedom of speech or freedom of movement. It is totally up to them where to live in Armenia or to leave Armenia and resettle in other countries. Apart from the 16 thousand refugees from Syria who have permanently settled down in Armenia, many thousands of Syrian refugees have moved from Armenia to other European countries, some families have resettled in the Nagorno Karabakh Republic. According to international fact-finding missions their number does not exceed two dozens and their migration has absolutely no indication of government-organized resettlement.

Thank you.