

Submission by the Republic of Armenia to the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

- The Republic of Armenia reiterates its readiness to be involved in the work of the UN High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. Armenia emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving, and the need to address the internal displacement from the perspectives of development, climate change, disaster management. Armenia is committed to be involved in coherent actions in that direction.
- Armenia is concerned about the highly increasing displacement at the global level and emphasizes solidarity with the plight of refugees, victims of forced displacement. At the same time, it should be emphasized that there is more to be done to prevent and resolve conflicts throughout the globe, addressing the root causes of displacement, and we reiterate our commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- We believe that for the implementation of the pledge of leaving no one behind, the universal application of human rights should be ensured equally and without any discrimination to all people in need, regardless of their location and irrespective of the political status of the territory that they live in.
- In response to the exceptional nature of the crisis presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the related challenges faced by States, there is a need for an effective response to the pandemic while at the same time respecting international human rights and humanitarian law standards in managing the displacement situations.
- Armenia is confident that there should be no hierarchy of displacement - all types of forced displacement deserve equal attention - and the refugees and IDPs deserve similar care and attention. Therefore, it is of high importance that the High-Level Panel display utmost vigilance and ensure the inclusiveness and transparency of the process.
- We would like to pay attention to the necessity to present accurate statistics and to develop precise guidelines and methodology of accounting of IDPs, due to which countries will avoid artificial increases in the number of IDPs to pursue their narrow political objectives. Many international organizations working in the field of protection of IDPs such as Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre raised concern about the intention of some countries to include the IDPs' descendants, returned IDPs and people in areas of insecurity in the total number of IDPs, thus contributing to an artificial rise of the overall figure of IDPs. So, there is a need to elaborate clear guidelines and precise methodology for accounting of IDPs.
- Armenia attaches great importance to improved data collection, the development of comparable international standards for internally displaced persons statistics

and calls for enhanced international cooperation to improve data collection in this regard.

- The Government of Armenia has approached the issue of IDPs since 2000¹. In 2002, the National Assembly of Armenia adopted the Law on Approving the Complex Development Program for the Border Areas in Armenia. In 2002-2004 the State Migration Agency with involvement of the Norwegian Refugee Council undertook registration of IDPs in bordering area and carried out IDPs allocation mapping and a study of their willingness to return to their original places of residence. The mapping research conducted in 186 villages bordering Azerbaijan involved all the 65.647 households. According to the research, IDPs were recognized in 5 marzes (regions of Armenia) Tavush, Gegharkunik, Syunik, Vayots Dzor and Ararat, all together representing 16.962 km square. The study also showed that 16.433 houses were damaged by bombing and 1.694 houses were completely destroyed.

To approach those issues, the Government of RA developed two components: 1) To support the return of IDPs and 2) to rehabilitate social infrastructure such as their apartments, houses, roads and schools. Total budget which was adopted by the Government was 38.519.185 USD.

After the visit to the country of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced People Mr. Kälin, the issue of IDPs was raised within the context of received recommendations and discussed with UNHCR office in Armenia. During the Working Group Discussion on the IDP issues in Armenia on 24 November 2010 with UN agencies accredited in Armenia, a phase approach was suggested, made on the basis of a pilot project that would entail both update of numbers and design of a return project for that particular area. The Government agreed to choose a pilot area within the highest number of IDPs, but unfortunately due to insufficient financial assistance from the international donor organizations till now there is no progress in supporting the realization of this project, and the IDP issue remained without attention.

- In the case of unresolved conflicts, the problem of internally displaced persons can not be separated from the problem of refugees and other displaced population, residing in conflict areas since these are humanitarian issues of the same type and sensitivity. As is the case of some countries - party to a conflict - these two issues are separated and the presence of internally displaced persons in the country is manipulated for political purposes.

¹ According to census of 1979 in the Former Soviet Union, 475.500 Armenians lived in Azerbaijan and 123.076 in Nagorno Karabakh. About half a million Armenians were displaced from their permanent residences in Azerbaijan due to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict of which 360 000 found refuge in Armenia. During those years, Armenia went through another ordeal - the destructive earthquake of December 1988 which killed some 25.000 people, about 1/3 of Armenia's territory was completely destroyed, 530 000 people became homeless. Consequently, Armenia had 192.000 displaced people, out of which: 100 000 - as a result of the earthquake, 72 000 - as a result of the bombardments of Armenia's border regions due to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, and the rest part - due to man-made and natural disasters.

According to the census of 1989 in the former Soviet Union, 168.000 Azerbaijanis lived in Armenia and 45.000 in Nagorno Karabakh. Later, in 1988, 144.000 Azerbaijanis left Armenia by selling or exchanging their homes, documentary evidence of which is kept at municipalities.

- The experience of Armenia that hosted displaced population in 2016² has highlighted the need to elaborate contingency planning and contingency preparedness plans and programmes and to work closely with international partners to this end.
- The possible formulations of conflicts need to be based on the terms used by the official and internationally-mandated mediating formats, maintaining impartiality and refraining from any formulation that is detrimental to the negotiation process. Displaced persons must not be instrumentalized for political objectives, regardless of what these objectives might be.
- Armenia condemns the situation when a state deliberately fails to address the social problems of displaced persons in order to use them as a tool of political pressure in negotiations. Such an approach is fundamentally at odds with the principles of humanity and the protection of human rights.
- Armenia has pursued the policy of refugees' and IDP's integration into society since the very first days of their acceptance and has never politicized this issue or used the IDP's as tools to achieve certain political objectives. The Armenian National Action Plan on implementation of the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for 2019-2021 involves programs for refugee or displaced women aimed at ensuring the involvement of displaced women in economic, social, educational and environmental spheres.
- Notwithstanding the crucial achievements, challenges remain in addressing the needs of the displaced persons and in finding durable housing solutions and long-term employment and income sources. We welcome very much the ongoing efforts of UNHCR addressing most urgent humanitarian needs of the displaced and facilitating different dimensions of integration. However, while addressing displacement challenges, the international community should contribute to more equitable responsibility sharing.

² As a result of Azerbaijani aggression in April 2016 Armenia received displaced families from Nagorno Karabakh villages of Talish, Mardakert, Martuni and Hadrut. Between 2 April and 20 July 2016, UNHCR identified and assessed 681 displaced households (2258 individuals). Remaining displacement from Nagorno Karabakh, about 160 families (573 persons) mainly from the significantly conflict affected village of Talish are still in Armenia, many of whom reside in the small town of Charentsavan. Both Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic have made every effort to integrate these individuals, providing them with citizenship, housing and other basic necessities.