

**Speech of the Head of the UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and
Vienna- based UN Agencies, Mr. Frank Remus**

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
in Warsaw, 03 October 2013**

Distinguished Chairman,

Dear participants,

I would like to thank the organizers of this meeting for the opportunity to speak to you today on issues which are important for the organization I am representing and for myself.

UNHCR has prepared a written contribution to this meeting which is going to be distributed to all of you. Therefore I will concentrate in my speech on main developments related to refugee protection, to refugee protection and international migration and the protection of internally displaced persons during the period from last year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting until today.

At the end of 2012, worldwide an estimated 45.2 million persons had unwillingly left their homes or remained in exile as a result of persecution, conflict, generalised violence and human rights violations. Many countries were affected by events resulting in new forced displacement, including in North Africa and the Middle East, notably Syria. Some 4.8 million persons of UNHCR's concern are in the OSCE region. They include some 2.4 million refugees and asylum seekers, 1.4 million internally displaced persons and one million returnees, stateless and other persons of concern.

Assisting States to build and strengthen their protection responses and systems is part of UNHCR's core function. In a turbulent year, characterized by insecurity and unrest in a number of regions around the world, emergency response was a key focus of UNHCR's protection activities.

The last year was dominated by a number of complex and massive

displacement crises related to conflicts including in the Syrian. By beginning of September 2013, the total number of refugees who fled the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic since it began two years ago surpassed 2 million persons, and the number of internally displaced reached over 4.25 million. The absence of a solution to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, the pace at which displacement continues to escalate and the broader implications for regional security and stability makes it one of the most complex conflicts facing the international community, including the OSCE region, today.

A number of countries have implemented an effective protection regime in major emergencies. In the Syria emergency, neighbouring States largely kept their borders open, respected the principle of non-refoulement and provided sanctuary for massive numbers of refugees, despite the significant social and economic implications this has had for their own countries. Turkey has formally provided Syrian refugees with temporary protection and recently incorporated temporary protection into its new national asylum law. The efforts of host countries have saved countless lives and underscore a common commitment to the institution of asylum.

In internal displacement emergencies, the protection challenges are compounded by targeted armed attacks, killings, sexual and gender-based violence and forced recruitment, particularly of children. Limited access to internally displaced people (IDP) and areas of conflict has made protection monitoring and accurately assessing needs extremely difficult in some countries. In the Syria, UNHCR is diversifying its partnerships with local organizations, forming an outreach volunteer programme and opening a network of community centres offering counselling, community psychosocial support and other services for persons with specific needs, including the elderly and those with disabilities.

At the policy level, 2012 saw important efforts by humanitarian actors, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Transformative Agenda, to enhance the effectiveness of their response through better leadership, accountability and coordination of the cluster system – particularly in large-scale emergencies.

The international protection regime functions best when the necessary legislative, administrative, judicial and other elements are in place for

States to receive and protect asylum-seekers and refugees.

At the regional level, protection systems have been strengthened. At European Union (EU) level, the European Asylum Support Office has continued intensive work to facilitate practical cooperation among EU Member States, particularly in the fields of training, country-of-origin information and quality assurance, as well as in preparation for a new “early warning mechanism”.

States have also advanced their domestic laws and policies. New or amended laws relating to asylum-seekers and refugees have been enacted in a number of countries, including Kyrgyzstan and Turkey.

The principle of non-refoulement rests at the center of the institution of asylum. Although they remained exceptional, 2012 did see a number of instances of direct and indirect refoulement. UNHCR contributed to numerous training and other activities for border officials in several regions, including with the European Border Agency, Frontex and the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

UNHCR has remained actively engaged in broader asylum and migration debates, both at the policy and operational levels, ensuring that international protection principles are reflected in the development of responses to migration.

The 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration remains the primary tool for UNHCR’s engagement in the area of refugee protection and international migration. UNHCR developed a compilation of practical examples in 2012, entitled the 10-Point Plan in Action. In Tajikistan, the Border Management Strategy and its implementation plan are good examples of the inclusion of refugee protection considerations within a broader migration strategy.

While States have full responsibility for protecting internally displaced persons, their own citizens, other actors, including UNHCR, may assist them in discharging this responsibility.

The main achievement in this regard has been the progressive acceptance by States of the validity of international standards for IDPs. This is exemplified by growing recognition of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement by States.

UNHCR has continued to work with government authorities and partners in various countries to encourage adoption or enhancement of national laws and policies on IDPs and to build institutional capacity, including in Afghanistan and Georgia. It closely cooperates with the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs. In 2012, UNHCR initiated a project on IDP law and institution building funded by the United States of America. The project has helped bring support and technical advice to IDP operations in Afghanistan.

Dear participants, I would like to encourage you to read the comprehensive solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons in the UNHCR document distributed to you since it shows the achievements on finding solutions for thousands of people.

Allow me at the end two concluding remarks:

Conflict, violence and human rights abuses continue to uproot a rapidly increasing number of people around the world. Newly displaced people joined the large number of those already affected by unresolved situations for whom no solutions are in sight. Growing levels of poverty and unemployment have proven to be sources of social and political unrest. In this environment, functioning protection systems – which respect the right to access asylum and safety, allow for the identification of needs and the fair and expeditious determination of asylum claims, ensure fair treatment and pave the way for the resumption of normal lives – are crucial.

Building, strengthening and sustaining such systems for all displaced persons, including refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs, is and must remain a common goal. Protection systems are grounded in the commitment of States to assume their responsibilities, but they are also dependent on genuine solidarity, international cooperation, burden and responsibility sharing between States, together with UNHCR and other partners. UNHCR looks forward to continued collaboration with States on the implementation of these pledges and the strengthening of protection systems.

Thank you for your attention.