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600 000 IDPs waiting for 20 years to return to Nagorno-Karabakh and the 7 Azerbaijani districts occupied by Armenia

600 000 is the number of internally displaced people in Azerbaijan that the UNHCR mentioned in its report Global Trends in 2009.

These 600 000 IDPs were violently forced from their homes during the armed aggression by the Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijan.

More than 40,000 come from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and around 550,000 come from the seven surrounding districts of Azerbaijan. As a result of an ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Armenian forces not a single Azerbaijani remained there. All these regions have been occupied by Armenia for almost 20 years despite numerous decisions adopted by the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Since 1992, the political settlement of the conflict has been discussed within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group with Russia, United States and France as its Co-Chairs. The peace talks were reinvigorated in 2009 with the promotion of the Basic Principles contained in the Madrid Document and the Statement by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries on 10 July 2009. The Basic Principles call for:

- The return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control;
- An interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance;
- A corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh;

- Future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will;
- The right of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to return to their former places of residence;
- International security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.

Notwithstanding the work of the Minsk Group and the numerous meetings between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan since 2009, the endorsement of the Basic Principles that will open the way for a comprehensive peace settlement has remained elusive.

The Azerbaijani community of the Nagorno-Karabakh region must participate fully, directly and equally in all discussions concerning the future of this region. Therefore, the return of the expelled Azerbaijani population to their homes is of essential importance to the entire peace process. This return, implemented in voluntary, safe and dignified manner, will become the first step on the path towards gradual restoration of peaceful co-existence of the two communities of the Nagorno-Karabakh region

Earlier this year, Human Rights Without Frontiers International visited IDPs dormitories and collective settlements located in Baku and at its outskirts, and interviewed dozens of survivors from the massacres in Khojali, Shusha, Kelbajar, Agdam, Fizuli and Zangelan. They unanimously said “The hope to return back home is the only reason for us to live.”

Recommendations

Given the seriousness of the protracted displacement situation in Azerbaijan, **Human Rights Without Frontiers International** recommends the following to meet the expectations of the 600,000 IDPs victims of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan:

- Active involvement in the process of conflict resolution and peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict;
- Support to the adoption and implementation of the Madrid Principles elaborated by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs as a framework for finding a soonest durable solution to the conflict on the basis of the norms and principles of international law;
- Promotion of the study of models of autonomy and self-governance in Europe (i.e. South Tyrol, Åland Islands, Northern Ireland and *Spanish provinces*), including arrangements for administration, policing and economy;
- Promotion of the study of the successful precedents of the IDPs return and restoration of peaceful co-existence in ethnically mixed areas;
- Commitment to the process of confidence-building with the involvement of the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and peace-building in the region by means of cross-border programs and dialogue among civil societies as tools for conflict transformation, once the necessary political conditions are in place;
- Support to initiatives promoting reconciliation and contacts between local populations and individuals.

