



**STATEMENT BY MS. MIROSLAVA BEHAM,  
AMBASSADOR OF SERBIA,  
ON CURRENT ISSUES  
CONCERNING THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA,  
AT THE 718<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF  
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

26 June 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The delegation of Serbia would like to inform the distinguished Permanent Council that the World Refugee Day on 20 June 2008 was commemorated in Serbia with a number of events involving civil society and representatives of the Serbian authorities. Unfortunately, the events were not only an occasion to raise the awareness of the Serbian public for the millions of people throughout the world who lost everything but their lives. Commemorating the troubles and sufferings of the world's huge refugee population was rather an occasion to remind Serbia and the world that our country is, in fact, one of the world's biggest problems in this respect.

As the statistics of the UNHCR or, for example, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants show, Serbia is by the number of refugees the first country in Europe and the thirteenth in the world and is ranged among the 10 countries in the world with a longstanding refugee problem. We are not talking about the burden these people represent for our country, or not only about that, but about the distressed lives of tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands of people. Serbia has some 100,000 registered refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia and more than 200.000 Internally Displaced Persons from Kosovo. Out of the 550.000 persons, who had a refugee status in 1996, about 200.000 have been granted the Serbian citizenship meanwhile, but most of them continue to live in Serbia the life of refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

As it is stressed in the Press Release of 20 June, which we circulated to the delegations, the President of Serbia H.E. Mr. Boris Tadic stressed on the occasion of the World Refugee Day that a full integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union will considerably help to find a durable solution for the problem of refugees and displaced persons by improving the overall economic and living standards of the countries in the region.

However, as President Tadic stated, additional efforts have to be made by Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb to address the refugee problem on a regional level, with the support of the international community. Allow me to explicitly refer in this regard to the President's words: "Serbia upholds the initiative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to revive the Sarajevo process, that is to find durable solutions for refugees in the region of former Yugoslavia. For its part, Serbia is ready for the full implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration, and I hope that the authorities in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are ready as well".

Mr. Chairman,

Serbia is more than prepared to actively and fully engage in finally solving - through integration and return - the hardship of tens of thousands of people. In this respect we urgently need and sincerely welcome the tireless efforts and the valuable support of the international community, including the OSCE.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman