

The Commissariat for Refugees issued the following Press Release to mark the 16th anniversary of the suffering of Serbian people during the military-police operation "Oluja":

Thursday, August 4, 2011, will be the 16th anniversary of the military-police operation "Oluja", during which 2,500 people were killed and around 200,000 exiled into the Republic of Serbia. 16 years after this tragic event took place, 2,300 people are still listed as missing.

Today, more than a decade and a half later, Serbia is the country with the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Europe. Of the 610,000 people which were affected by the war in 1991, and sought refuge in the Republic of Serbia, over 75,000 still have the status of refugees and 75% of them are refugees from the Republic of Croatia.

Despite all the economic issues which Serbia has been facing for the last 2 years, it invested great efforts to create and successfully implement programs for durable solutions, sustainable integration and dignified living conditions of the refugees. For this purpose, significant funds were allocated from the budget of the Republic of Serbia and additional support was provided by the EU and international funds. Partially, refugees and internally displaced persons participated in fundraising as well.

For the past 3 years, the efforts the Serbian government, brought into action through the Commissariat for Refugees, reduced the number of the collective centers by one third, and the number of their residents by one half. 3,878 refugees and internally displaced persons were accommodated within the remaining 52 collective centers. There is a plan to close another 10 centers and provide durable housing solutions by the realization of the projects financially supported by international and bilateral donors by the end of the year.

Regardless of the fact that the number of refugees has reduced by 14% in the last year, Serbia remains one of only 5 countries of the world with the protracted refugee crisis. The main reason is unwillingness of the Republic of Croatia to successfully solve the problems of property and rights of their citizens of Serbian origin, who live in the Republic of Serbia as refugees, as well as those in the Republic of Croatia. More intense regional cooperation between the countries of the former Yugoslavia should speed up the process of solving this crisis in 2010 and terminate it in the future.

The Republic of Serbia and the Commissariat for Refugees will continue to invest maximum efforts into finding the best solutions for all the refugees who have decided to live in the territory of Serbia. Our country will continue to actively cooperate with all the countries of the region, in order to contribute to the efficient repatriation of all the people who have expressed desire to return to their homes.