



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Third High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges

"Challenges for Persons of Concern in Urban Settings"

STATEMENT

by

**Ambassador Dr Uglješa Zvekić, Permanent Representative of the
Republic of Serbia to the United Nations and other International
Organizations in Geneva**

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Mr. High Commissioner,
Distinguished participants in the dialogue,

I would like, at the outset, to express our appreciation for the High Commissioner's initiative last year for the dialogue on protracted refugee situations, thereby paving the way for a favourable cooperation between the countries in the region in resolving this highly sensitive issue. We sincerely hope that this situation in our region will come to an end soon and in a fair and constructive manner for the benefit of all protracted refugees.

Similarly, we are also very grateful for the High Commissioner's this year initiative to deal with the urban refugee's situations. The Serbian experience in this respect could serve as a valuable contribution to this dialogue.

Initially, the immense influx of refugees and IDP's in Serbia, as a consequence of the conflict in the territory of former Yugoslavia, affected all municipalities alike, whether rural or urban. Although the government has tried to accommodate them to an equal extent in cities as well as in rural areas where appropriate projects were offered, the number of refugees has been so significant that many of them moved , Belgrade in particular, since the opportunities for finding source of income seemed greater.

On the basis of our experience we would briefly like to point to some major issues to be addressed in more details by the group sessions:

- **Identifying persons of concern in urban settings** -majority of urban refugees and IDP's are staying with local host families, many of them belong to the same ethnic group, speak the same language and have personal ties to the people living in cities;
- **Effects on local host communities** - local population and refugees and IDP"s are often faced with the same challenges, so the economic gap between them is reduced; after both being even more marginalised, less visible they become;
- In some respect, for those who opted for residing in urban areas, **the process of local integration may have been quicker, but certainly not easier nor more successful.** Although access to education and health care has been provided by the state, housing and employment are and continue to be an issue. Those who succeeded in integrating have done so by independently making use of their own resources;
- **Return to their respective country of origin** - it appears that for those who decide to return to rural areas and rely on their own land and resources, the process of return is easier and more successful than for those returning to urban areas. Serious obstacles emerge in those cases in which individual rights, such as tenancy rights, are not restored;

Mr. High Commissioner,

Let me take this opportunity to extend to you an invitation to attend the Regional Conference on the subject of "Durable Solutions for Refugees – Cooperation in the Region in the Process of European Integrations", which will be held in Belgrade early next year. The countries of the region met yesterday in Belgrade in order to finalise the agenda of the Conference. We hope that it will be another concrete step towards the solution of the still existing refugee problems in our region, including urban refugee problems.

Thank you