



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to UNHCR Ruud Lubbers

Delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Douglas A. Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me join the others in welcoming the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the Permanent Council today. We appreciate his very thoughtful intervention as well as the excellent cooperation that UNHCR maintains with the United States.

Mr. Chairman, I should like to begin today, as Mr. Lubbers himself did, with a few thoughts on the humanitarian situation in Iraq. I know that this issue weighs heavily on the minds of many around this table.

The United States feels deep concern for the humanitarian problems of the people of Iraq and has long been concerned about the violations of human rights that they have for so long suffered at the hands of Saddam Hussein's regime, which is the very situation that Mr. Lubbers notes, which forced many of them to seek asylum across the OSCE area.

Over the last several months, the United States has taken unprecedented steps to limit the adverse humanitarian consequences of a conflict with Iraq and to provide relief as quickly as possible to the Iraqi people. We are working closely in this regard with the United Nations, which has a lead role in coordinating and providing humanitarian assistance.

As Mr. Lubbers notes, the events in Iraq do not appear to have resulted yet in significant numbers of IDP or refugees. Indeed, the IDP situation in the North is stabilizing, with recent reports of people returning to their homes.

Nonetheless, the United States has pre-positioned stockpiles of emergency supplies, including food, medical kits, blankets and shelter materials. This is the largest such relief preparations we have ever undertaken.

We are making available for this purpose 670,000 metric tons of food with a total value of \$549 million. In addition, the United States Agency for International Development is donating \$246 million in non-food aid.

Of the funds provided by USAID and the U.S. State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration, almost \$125 million is going to the United Nations and other international organizations to address the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people, of which UNHCR will receive \$21 million.

Mr. Chairman, even as we focus our attention on alleviating the needs of the Iraqi people, the United States will not lose sight of other, just as urgent, humanitarian problems in the OSCE region.

The OSCE decision to grant Partner Status to Afghanistan is a significant opportunity for the OSCE and its institutions to help contribute to the security, stability, and economic reconstruction that are needed to encourage the safe and dignified return of displaced Afghan citizens.

We are also engaged actively in facilitating the return of displaced persons in the Balkans. While there has been much progress in that region, more than 1 million refugees and displaced persons in South-Eastern Europe still await a durable solution to their plight, the largest concentration of displaced persons being hosted by Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to UNHCR data, over 200,000 persons should be given the opportunity to return to Croatia, with approximately the same number to Kosovo and another 100,000 should be given the opportunity to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Chairman, the United States also has serious concerns over the situation of displaced persons in Chechnya and Ingushetia. We believe the OSCE has a valuable and continuing role to play in assisting displaced persons there. One possible future joint project with UNHCR would be to provide the IDPs with the necessary legal assistance to understand their rights and obtain the benefits to which they are entitled.

In closing Mr. Chairman, I should like to compliment Mr. Lubbers on the very useful and informative informal briefing on Statelessness that the UNHCR Liaison Office provided to us here last year. May I suggest that it could be similarly productive for UNHCR to organize another such briefing, perhaps focusing on its views of the role of OSCE in addressing the needs of refugees and IDPs. Once again, the United States greatly appreciates the hard work of your staff here in Vienna and those working with the OSCE in the field. They contribute greatly to the good relations between our two organizations.

Thank you.