



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on International Humanitarian Issues - Refugees**

As prepared for delivery by Marc Meznar,  
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration  
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Warsaw, September 20, 2005

The United States applauds the Slovenian Chairmanship for making migration and integration a priority this year at the OSCE. These are among the most pressing issues facing the OSCE participating States in the 21st century. We will continue to support OSCE activities that help participating States meet the multidimensional challenges of migration, and especially integration of immigrants into public life and societies. Marginalizing groups benefits no one. We have seen the consequences when migrants are, or perceive that they are, excluded in society. Recent events in Western Europe should cause us to reflect on children of migrants, as well as the third generation, who fail to establish strong ties with the host society while losing their cultural attachment to countries of origin.

In addition to migration issues, challenges relating to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue throughout the OSCE region. Ten years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the United States welcomes the Sarajevo Declaration concerning the return of refugees in the Balkans. However, we wish to stress that the governments concerned must ensure that returnees can find durable solutions and not simply trade refugee status for internal displacement when they return to their home countries.

It is a great step forward that the number of IDPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina has fallen from 310,000 to 185,000 according to data from this April's re-registration. We hope the positive trends concerning property restitution and education reform will continue. However, state authorities must improve implementation of human rights commitments and end discrimination based on ethnicity to enable remaining displaced persons to return.

While the number of displaced persons in Croatia is relatively small, the United States urges the Government of Croatia to redouble its efforts to return displaced persons to their former residences. Moreover, we call on Croatian authorities to assist in repossessing properties temporarily occupied by others and providing reconstruction assistance for homes damaged in the conflict. Considering that Croatia's legal framework does not allow for repossession of "socially-owned" property, we urge Croatian authorities to arrange for housing alternatives for former tenancy rights holders.

Regarding Serbia and Montenegro, the United States welcomed the adoption of an asylum law that should strengthen the protection of asylum seekers and refugees. However, the overall situation for the internally displaced is increasingly difficult, especially for the 6,800 IDPs still living in collective centers. The United States urges Belgrade to find more durable solutions for these individuals, especially with respect to housing, education and access to health care and other social services. In this regard, we call on the authorities to remove

burdensome documentation and administrative requirements that effectively preclude many IDPs from gaining access to basic services.

A situation requiring immediate attention concerns the more than 500 displaced Roma affected by lead poisoning in camps in the Northern Mitrovica region of Kosovo. The United States urges the UN authorities to establish an uncontaminated site for this population immediately, to rebuild the community, and to provide timely medical treatment for the families now suffering from lead poisoning. The U.S. Government is responding to this humanitarian emergency and we encourage other governments to do the same.

Displaced persons and returnees in Kosovo continue to fear persistent low-level harassment which curtails their freedom of movement and limits employment opportunities. The United States finds particularly problematic attempts by some countries, which have provided temporary protected status to Kosovo refugees, to prematurely pressure these individuals to return to Kosovo. Kosovo must strengthen the rule of law and improve minority rights in order to address these displacement issues and the situation of minorities in Kosovo. The international community, including the OSCE, must continue to insist on greater progress in meeting international standards set for Kosovo.

The United States welcomed Turkey's enactment of the Law on Compensation and the establishment of a special commission to examine compensation requests of internally displaced persons. However, we are concerned about the very low number of individuals awarded compensation and urge the Government of Turkey to extend the deadline for applying. In addition, we encourage Turkey to take into account the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in developing any new strategies on IDPs, and urge the government to establish a dedicated IDP unit to ensure full, transparent and non-discriminatory implementation of this plan. While we recognize the disturbing increase in violence in southeastern Turkey, we believe the village guard system has itself created more insecurity than security, continues to be a hindrance to large-scale returns, and should be dismantled.

In Azerbaijan, the situation for IDPs remains difficult. We urge the Government to allow the local integration of IDPs and to remove barriers to voting removed before the November parliamentary elections.

The United States calls for continued attention to the situation of displaced persons from Chechnya in the North Caucasus. The closure of IDP camps last year in neighbouring provinces led many of them to return to Chechnya. Many of them have returned to live in accommodation centers that do not meet international standards and the security situation in the republic is still volatile. Those who have remained outside Chechnya have expressed the desire to integrate into the communities where they now reside or do not wish to return until the security improves. We urge the Russian Federation to abide by its OSCE commitments and consider the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement when dealing with these issues.

The United States welcomed the willingness of Turkmenistan authorities to work with the UNHCR to register all the refugees in the country. However, we remain concerned by the internal deportation in April of 40 ethnic Uzbek families from the Uzbekistan border.

Finally, we applaud the Government of Kyrgyzstan for upholding international law and allowing Uzbek refugees to seek temporary refuge. We also applaud the Romanian

Government for providing sanctuary for the Uzbek asylum seekers coming from Kyrgyzstan. These asylum seekers are being screened by UNHCR for referral to more than 10 countries that have expressed interest in providing resettlement opportunities, including the U.S., Australia, and Canada. We urge Kyrgyzstan officials to respect international law and the spirit of the OSCE human dimension commitments, not to forcibly extradite the remaining refugees back to Uzbekistan, and to allow currently detained refugees to depart for the Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland -- which have offered them refugee status. The United States urges the Government of Uzbekistan to end its demands for the forced return of Andijon refugees from the UNHCR conducted resettlement program.