



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic delivered a statement at the 71st session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR and pointed out that the global pandemic caused by coronavirus brought to mind the importance of international cooperation and solidarity and expressed special gratitude to UNHCR and OSCE that provided housing for the most vulnerable refugees.

At the beginning of this statement, the Minister thanked all that have assisted the realization of the Joint Regional Housing Programme on Durable Solutions for Refugees and Displaced Persons in the territory of the former SFRY, which is being implemented in the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia and Montenegro.

"We owe a special debt of gratitude to the UNHCR and OSCE who provided housing to the most vulnerable refugees. Due to our joint efforts, 5,143 families in Serbia have been provided housing solutions so far in the framework of the Regional Housing Programme," Minister Dacic said.

According to him, the Regional Housing Programme is an example that a way to resolve a problem can always be found when there is a will.

"This is an important message indeed since in addition to refugees from former SFRY, in the Republic of Serbia, there are also approximately 200,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. Even 21 years after their displacement, conditions for their sustainable return have not been created", Dacic said and emphasized that a negligible fraction realized their right of return, to freely dispose of their property, not be discriminated against and enabled free access to political, economic and social rights in Kosovo and Metohija.

The internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija have been waiting far too long to have their basic existential questions resolved, Minister Dacic said and recalled that the Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija have been living outside their homes for more than two decades

which is one of the most long-lasting internal displacements in Europe.

"We consider that it is high time that concrete measures were taken to help these people. Therefore, we would highly appreciate additional engagement and support of international partners in resolving the problems of protracted displacement of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija, taking into account the lessons learned and good practice", the Minister pointed out.

He went on and said that the Republic of Serbia was already assisting internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija – by implementing the programs funded from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, donations and EU pre-accession funds.

"In anticipation of concrete initiatives for the resolution of the situation of long-lasting internal displacement in Serbia, let me in the end express once again our gratitude to the High Commissioner Grandi and UNHCR for their commitment and tireless efforts to assist all forcibly displaced persons in the pandemic situation, as well as for their engagement within the global refugee migrant crisis," Minister Dacic said.

Complete statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic at the 71st session of the Executive Committee of the UHC follows:

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honour and pleasure to have the opportunity on behalf of the Republic of Serbia to express support to the efforts made by the UNHCR and its comprehensive commitment to protecting all categories of forcibly displaced persons. The activity and work of the UNHCR are all the more important in these difficult circumstances when the hardships of displaced persons have been further aggravated amid the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The global pandemic triggered by coronavirus has reminded us of the importance of international cooperation and solidarity in overcoming difficulties. While the problems brought about by the pandemic are indeed serious, the challenges experienced in ensuring protection of refugees and displaced persons remain the focus of states and international institutions. The latest deeply worrying information specifies that there are 26 million refugees in the world today, 45.7 million of internally displaced persons and 4.2 million asylum-seekers. We note with regret the increase in both the number of forcibly displaced persons, but also migrants at the global level. The resolution of these complex problems challenges our responsibility and commitment to the principle of humaneness and solidarity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to once again thank all who have assisted the realization of the Joint Regional Housing Programme on Durable Solutions for Refugees and Displaced Persons in the territory of the former SFRY, which is being implemented in the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia and Montenegro. We owe a special debt of gratitude to

the UNHCR and OSCE who provided housing to the most vulnerable refugees. Due to our joint efforts, 5,143 families in Serbia have been provided housing solutions so far in the framework of the Regional Housing Programme.

The Regional Housing Programme is an example that a way to resolve a problem can always be found when there is a will. This is an important message indeed since in addition to refugees from former SFRY, in the Republic of Serbia, there are also approximately 200,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. Even 21 years after their displacement, conditions for their sustainable return have not been created. I have to point out on this occasion as well that a negligible fraction realized their right of return, to freely dispose of their property, not be discriminated against and enabled free access to political, economic and social rights in Kosovo and Metohija.

Dear participants,

The internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija have been waiting far too long to have their basic existential questions resolved. Let me recall that the Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija have been living outside their homes for more than two decades which is one of the most long-lasting internal displacements in Europe. Merely 1.9 % of them managed to achieve a sustainable return to their homes, the smallest return rate in Europe. Internally displaced persons are hostages to unresolved questions, they are not enabled to exercise the right of a sustainable return to Kosovo and Metohija or access to human rights they are entitled to. It is truly dismaying that those who have undertaken to resolve this and are mandated to do so, have failed to provide protection of their rights.

We consider that it is high time that concrete measures were taken to help these people. Experience, models and tools developed to resolve protracted refugee situation within the Regional Housing Programme for Refugees, with certain modifications, could be applied in the case of internally displaced persons in Serbia. Therefore, we would highly appreciate additional engagement and support of international partners in resolving the problems of protracted displacement of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija, taking into account the lessons learned and good practice. I take this opportunity to emphasize that the Republic of Serbia is already assisting internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija – by implementing the programs funded from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, donations and EU pre-accession funds.

In anticipation of concrete initiatives for the resolution of the situation of long-lasting internal displacement in Serbia, let me in the end express once again our gratitude to the High Commissioner Grandi and UNHCR for their commitment and tireless efforts to assist all forcibly displaced persons in the pandemic situation, as well as for their engagement within the global refugee migrant crisis. UNHCR and other international partners may count on dedication and constructive cooperation of the Republic of Serbia in the future as well in an effort to overcome the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons who are one of the most vulnerable groups of the present-day world.

Thank you for your attention.