

STATEMENT
by H.E. Mr. Ashot HOVAKIMIAN, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Armenia, at the 67th Session of the Executive Committee of the High
Commissioner's Program
3 October 2016, Geneva

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. High Commissioner,
Distinguished delegates,

At the outset we would like to congratulate H.E. Mr. Filippo Grandi on his election this January as the 11th UN High Commissioner for Refugees and wish him success in his endeavors to address the global challenges refugees face across the globe. We express our firm commitment to continue our fruitful cooperation with the High Commissioner and his office in order to adequately meet the needs of displaced and provide necessary protection of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Armenia welcomed the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. We believe that the full implementation of commitments, particularly those related to a more equitable and responsibility sharing would make a real difference for the benefit of vulnerable groups.

For the past several years the problems of refugees have elevated into one of the acute global challenges of our times. Armenia has been facing the challenges relating to refugee hosting, assistance and integration for almost three decades. Starting from the late 80's when as a consequence of Azerbaijan's policy of ethnic cleansing hundreds of thousands of Armenians were expelled from their homes in Soviet Azerbaijan and found refuge in Armenia. As a result of Azerbaijan's military offensive of 1992-94 against Nagorno-Karabakh thousands of Armenians were forced to leave their homeland.

Mr. Chairman,

Today Nagorno-Karabakh itself continues hosting thousands of refugees and IDPs who are currently deprived from international assistance due to the non-cooperation of Azerbaijan. In this context we would like to stress the importance of providing equal, timely and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for refugees

and displaced by all Member States in cooperation with the United Nations and other partners.

Instead of disseminating false and senseless statements within the international fora including this one, Azerbaijan should refrain from the policy of the use of force and commit itself to the peaceful settlement of the NK conflict, based on the principles of the International Law, namely those related to the Self-determination of people, Territorial integrity and Non use of force and threat of force, as proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs and agreed by all OSCE Participating States.

On the first days of April, 2016, in violation of the cease-fire regime and norms of International humanitarian and human rights laws, Azerbaijan undertook another large-scale military aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, committing ISIL-style atrocities, such as mutilations and beheadings, celebrated and publicized through social networks, which constituted gross violations of core international instruments. This resulted in a number of casualties among civilians and another wave of displacement into Armenia of over 2000 civilians, overwhelmingly women, children and elderly. In this regard the Government of Armenia highly values the prompt and effective humanitarian response by the UNHCR Representation in Armenia, which quickly reached out to the people in need, offering targeted core relief items and within shortest time put into operation a cash based intervention system assisting the most vulnerable.

Mr. Chairman,

Armenia is seriously concerned by the humanitarian catastrophe undergoing in Syria and by the condition of the large number of displaced people. Today, Armenia is hosting more than 20.000 refugees from Syria, who sought protection in our country, making it the third largest recipient of Syrian refugees in Europe on per capita basis.

The Government of the Republic of Armenia has provided with a variety of protection options by way of accelerated asylum procedures, facilitated naturalization or granting of residence permits. State support in developing of the businesses, durable housing, necessary free of charge medical assistance and emergency help, psycho-social support, providing scholarships at the universities constitute another dimension of the assistance to the people displaced by the war in Syria.

We assure you of our firm commitment to further continue supporting the people who fled the conflict in Syria, including through providing a facilitated admission and integration.

The Armenian authorities have developed respective legal basis to provide refugee protection in the country. In addition to the Law on Refugees and Asylum, which was amended at the end of 2015 to include specific provisions on asylum-seekers with special needs, more than 20 Government decrees and other normative acts were adopted to regulate the field.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding the measures that have been introduced so far, challenges remain in addressing the needs of new arrivals, and in finding durable housing solutions and long term employment and income sources. This is why we welcome very much the ongoing efforts of UNHCR addressing most urgent humanitarian needs of the displaced and facilitating different dimensions of integration. However, to make this progress sustainable these efforts must be continued and reinforced hence we call upon the international donor community to uphold and extend the level of support to Armenia in addressing displacement challenges, which would contribute to more equitable responsibility sharing in this regard.

Thank you.