

Sixty-Eighth Session of the Executive Committee of High Commissioner's Programme

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**Statement by H.E. Ms Vesna Batistic Kos,
Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Republic of Croatia**

General debate, ITEM 4

Thank you Madame Chair,

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

We would like to thank the High Commissioner for providing us with a thorough overview of the UNHCR's strategy and policy priorities. We appreciate the UNHCR's hard work and dedication to strengthen humanitarian space.

In solving the dire situation of migration and refugee crisis, the role of the international organizations like UNCHR is indispensable. We welcome the **leading role of the UN** in this matter that was assumed through the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. We are looking forward to the future work on the two compacts and believe that the **expertise of UNHCR will have an important role** in the process.

Croatia has been taking an **active role within the EU** and at the global level in finding strategic, comprehensive and humanitarian approach to the migration and refugee crisis. We need an **effective management system** dealing with both external and internal aspects of crisis. Member states must see that the **protection of state sovereignty and respect of the principle of solidarity** are not two conflicting goals. As a **responsible member** of international community, each state needs **to take its share of burden** in securing basic assistance for people affected by refugee crises as none can manage the refugee crisis of **current magnitude** on its own.

The **cooperation with other states** during the migration and refugee crisis in Europe helped us **manage the flow** of more than 600.000 refugees and migrants and to ensure their protection. In 2015 Croatia has demonstrated its responsibility in cooperation and coordination with all neighboring countries within the so called Western Balkans migration route. We have shown our **responsibility in implementing all international and human rights standards** towards the refugees, by providing adequate reception, accommodation, healthcare and food. Nevertheless, the migrant crisis has shown the need in finding long-term durable solutions and addressing the root causes of migration, preventing illegal migration and human smuggling and ensuring the respect of human dignity.

Unfortunately, this was **not the first-time Croatia** has **faced** a massive refugee crisis. We hold in our memories refugees and displaced persons from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina whose

number during the Homeland War in Croatia in 1992 amounted to 800.000 – approximately 15% of the Croatian population of that time.

We would like to use this opportunity to **commend the UNHCR's *Advisory on the Implementation of the Durable Solutions Process (Sarajevo Process) for refugees from Croatia, displaced by the 91-95 conflict, including cessation of refugee status.*** In that vein, we agree that 20 years after the conflict it is time to bring this process to its end. Bearing in mind that Croatia has **met the vast majority** of the UNHCR's recommendations, we **welcome the UNHCR's recommendation** on the cessation of refugee status to be finalized as envisaged, by the end of 2017. We **call on all states** from the region involved in the process **to cooperate fully** and to take appropriate measures to fulfill the UNHCR's recommendation.

Consequently, Croatia has been **continuously cooperating** with countries in the Southeast Europe and international organizations to resolve this important issue. The progress was made by cooperation between UNHCR, the Croatian Government, the governments of the countries in the region and the international donors. Croatian authorities have, **through reconstruction and housing program, enabled the return of a significant number** of persons and provided financial resources from the state budget for the implementation of the national program of return, care of displaced persons, returnees and refugees, reconstruction and housing.

The 2014 UNHCR recommendation on the cessation of refugee status has been brought after careful and thorough consideration by the UNHCR, clearly **established that circumstances have ceased for the application of 1951 Geneva Convention on the concrete situation.** It has also provided for a gradual approach and number of safeguards that enable the closure of this long-lasting refugee crises while securing the durable solutions. The processes are up and running in securing the resolution of all residual issues and the time is high for the cessation **to become fully effective by the end of 2017, respecting the deadline provided for in recommendation.** This is **the focus we should devote to**, after more than twenty years and a huge role that international community has invested in assisting in setting the all-inclusive and fully operational processes aimed to **help the return or local integration of each and every willing person affected** by the situation.

At the December 2015 9th meeting of the Regional Housing Program Steering Committee and the 13th meeting of the RHP Fund Assembly of Donors Croatia has confirmed that it stays **devoted to full implementation** of the RHP in the Framework of the Sarajevo Process. In that sense, there is no correlation between **UNHCR's recommendation** on the cessation clause and Croatia's continuous role as the RHP implementing partner together with international partners and donors. As the only state in the region which implemented measurable programs to meet the Sarajevo's commitments, Croatia has **successfully rebuilt the lives of displaced persons, refugees** and returnees by resolving all the administrative barriers such as regulation of residence, citizenship, statutory rights, access to public usages and infrastructure.

In the end, principle of humanity, sharing of responsibility and solidarity, must be a priority in dealing with refugee issues. By giving the chance to people to rebuild their lives, we are also rebuilding the peace.

Thank you, Madame Chair.