



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
TO THE UN OFFICE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN GENEVA**

Check against delivery

First Global Refugee Forum

Statement by

Svetlana Geleva

Director for Multilateral Affairs and Security Cooperation

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Geneva, 18 December 2019

Mr. High Commissioner,

A year after the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees, it is a pleasure to take part in the first Global Refugee Forum gathering all relevant stakeholders committed to working together on alleviating the plight of millions of refugees around the globe and on helping their host countries. The Forum provides an excellent opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved over the last year and to identify what needs to be done to translate our legal and political commitments into effective actions nationally, regionally and globally.

The record of more than 70 million displaced people, including over 26 million refugees, half of them under 18 years old, is an overdue alarm for solidarity, burden-sharing, concerted and result oriented action, including addressing the root causes of displacement. The numbers are appalling, but we must not ever forget that human beings and personal tragedies are behind the statistics. Individuals desperately fighting for their right to life, dignity, and other inherent human rights, all of them are entitled to.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Republic of North Macedonia has faced several refugee and migrant waves. The first one was during the early 90s, as a consequence of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Later, in 1999, during the Kosovo

crisis we provided humanitarian protection to 360 000 persons. Most of around 400.000 refugees we sheltered over a decade returned to their homes, some moved to other countries, and some chose to remain with us to this very day and integrated in our society.

We have been, and are still witnessing a migrant crisis along the so-called Western-Balkans route. In the period of 2015/2016, we faced an influx of almost 800 000 people coming from the conflict zones in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and so on. Even though we are a transit country, and the wave has subsided, we remain responsible actors and we do not shy away from our commitments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the occasion of the GRF, North Macedonia pledges to resolve a protracted situation of refugees from Kosovo by granting long-term legal status in the country to all those who may qualify, under the Law on Foreigners, thus contributing to their self-reliance. Additionally, North Macedonia is committed to strengthening the asylum case management through updating the asylums module of the database for aliens, to increase capacity for protection to asylum seekers and persons under international protection in the country. We commit to establish a system of

protection against sexual and gender based violence, in line with the Istanbul Convention, which includes protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

The Government of North Macedonia has recently adopted the Law on the Ratification of the UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961. This was one of the priorities of the Government, as a part of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the fulfillment of the fundamental principle of "Leave no one behind" of the Agenda 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by commending the relentless humanitarian efforts of the UNHCR and its staff. I would also like to thank the Swiss Government for co-hosting this important event with UNHCR, as well as the co-convenors - the Governments of Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Germany, Pakistan and Turkey, for hosting and championing the cause of refugees.

Thank you.