

**Statement of  
H.E. Mr. Koba Subeliani, Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied  
Territories, Refugees and Accommodation of Georgia**

**UNHCR Ministerial Event  
7 December 2011** PM

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Georgia, it is my privilege to extend our profound respect to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The mission and work undertaken by the High Commissioner himself and his office is appreciated, valued and admired. I would like to emphasize that the protection and promotion of human rights is one of the cornerstones of domestic and foreign policy of my Government. Given this commitment and the continued efforts to enhance human rights protection in Georgia, my Government hereby pledges to ratify in the coming days the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and to ensure the full implementation of its provisions in the Georgian legislation.

Since 2007, the Government of Georgia has implemented a number of important projects and programs aimed at responding to the challenges posed by statelessness. The Working Group on Citizenship, operating in the framework of the State Migration Commission, conducted a comprehensive study to identify gaps in domestic legislation in line with 1954 and 1961 Conventions and to delineate effective ways of addressing them. On the basis of these recommendations, the government has prepared a package of amendments to normative acts. My government pledges to work with parliament to adopt these amendments.

As Georgia works hard to close the protection gaps in the area of statelessness, the challenges posed by refugees and internally displaced persons continue to top the government's response agenda. In this regard, I would like to underscore the valuable partnership between UNHCR and Georgia in devising and implementing deliberate and innovative action to alleviate the suffering of refugees and IDPs.

In 1999, Georgia provided asylum to more than 7,000 refugees fleeing violence from the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation. UNHCR was quick to render its immense experience to the Georgian Government, allowing collaborative efforts and effective solutions for the betterment of the lives of the refugees. With UNHCR's support, refugees were provided with Temporary Residence Permits, serving as identity cards for internal use and providing access to national services and with Convention Travel Documents, for external travel purposes.

Moreover, in 2010, a new well-equipped Asylum Seekers Centre was opened within the framework of a joint project between UNHCR and my Ministry, funded by the European Union and the Government of the United States.

As local integration is now the preferred option for refugees, they are provided with adequate accommodation, primary health care, educational support, including through vocational training and access to income-generating activities as well as a monthly cash allowance based on vulnerability criteria. Refugee children are assisted in their integration into the regular Georgian education system. More than 300 former refugees have made use of the opportunity to acquire Georgian citizenship and have been provided with a durable housing solution. I note with great pleasure that according to the assessment of the UNHCR Global Appeal of 2011, Georgia fully uses the available tools for the integration of refugees. Georgia pledges to continue its efforts toward the full integration of refugees.

Georgia has also continued to improve its legislative framework for the protection of refugees. Last week, Georgia adopted a new Law of Refugees and Humanitarian Statutes, in the spirit of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Georgia pledges to fully implement the new law.

Among the many displacement challenges experienced by my country in the recent past, one with the gravest impact resulted from the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the ongoing occupation of two of its regions that together make up twenty percent of my country's territory: the region of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. Today, half a million persons are displaced. This means that every eleventh person in Georgia is displaced, unable to return to his or her habitual residence. Without much pondering, it is evident this is a true humanitarian, social and economic crisis.

UNHCR plays a pivotal role in assisting my government in responding to this dire humanitarian situation and addressing the needs of the IDPs.

To safeguard the rights of IDPs, in 2007 Georgia, in close partnership with the UNHCR, elaborated a State Strategy on IDPs and its Action Plan, aimed at providing long-term and sustainable solutions to IDPs, including through durable housing solutions and socio-economic integration. In line with the action plan and state strategy, a total of 654 buildings in the capital city of Tbilisi and in the regions have been rehabilitated and transferred into the ownership of 22,000 IDP families, free of charge. Up to 5,000 IDP families received monetary compensations for purchasing accommodation. In total, more than 90,000 persons have already received durable housing solutions and have become the legal owners of the decent living spaces they reside in.

Thirty-nine new IDP settlements were constructed by the Government with the contribution of the EU, the World Bank, German and Turkish governments, allowing up to 7,000 families to be resettled as early as the beginning of December 2008, only 4 months after the war. These families also received all necessary inventory, initial financial support and food aid.

Provision of durable housing solution continues to top our agenda as we construct new apartment blocks in regional economic centres of Georgia, purchase rural houses with agriculture land plots and rehabilitate idle buildings and collective centres.

These efforts to address the plight of IDPs on behalf of my government, the UNHCR and other actors, to whom we are deeply grateful, have yielded remarkable results.

However, we are far from having resolved the displacement challenge facing Georgia or in fact, the world. Therefore, we have to strengthen our engagement and commitment to fighting both the root-causes of displacement as well as the aftermath. This requires a sober and honest assessment of displacement by us all and the convergence of global political will to continue to narrow protection gaps in the international legal framework and in practice to ensure that no displaced person is left without safeguards.

In the case of Georgia, I must emphasize that our tireless efforts to assist IDPs in local integration, does in no way undermine their right of voluntary return to their homes in safety and dignity, as provided by international law and reaffirmed in the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on the “Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia”.

In light of the above, we pledge our commitment to continue our efforts to address the challenges of displacement and to protect and promote rights of individuals affected by displacement. Once again, I thank the UNHCR for its unparalleled commitment to the cause of the forcibly displaced.

Thank You.