



The Republic of Serbia

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Statement

by

H. E. Mr. Ivica Dačić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior
UNHCR anniversaries of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and
the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness Geneva, 7 December 2011

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Esteemed guests,

We have gathered here today at the Palace of the United Nations to mark a jubilee – the 60th anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and 50th Anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, adopted with a noble goal to assist and return dignity to persons who, without any guilt on their part, were forced to leave their homes and countries. The high level of this gathering, participated by officials of almost all the countries in the world, demonstrates the significance of these issues for the international community and all of us.

Whether caused by natural or human factors, displacement has been and remains to be one of the major problems all over the world. In the year of marking the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention, the problem of refugees and forced displacement is not less topical than it was at the time the UNHCR was founded.

In the meanwhile, the causes for displacement have multiplied, and internally displaced persons have outnumbered refugees. In order to solve or mitigate these problems, we need political will, genuine understanding and joint efforts by all stakeholders.

This is an occasion for giving recognition to the UNHCR Office for its overall engagement all these years, as well as to Mr António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, for his personal efforts and perseverance to draw attention of the international community to the complex and difficult problem of long-staying refugee population in the world, and Western Balkans in particular.

In seeking just and durable solutions for refugees, we need to take into account both humanitarian and human rights aspects. In that context, the Conventions on Refugees and Statelessness are indispensable. It is my honour to inform you that in October this year my country ratified the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, thus giving its contribution to marking these two anniversaries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Serbia has accepted the UNHCR initiative for finding durable solutions for 1991-1995 refugees in the region and organised a ministerial conference for the four countries of the region, in Belgrade, in March 2010. The outcome of the conference was the Joint Declaration signed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Western Balkan countries on 7 November 2011 in Belgrade, as a political and humanitarian framework for solving the long-lasting refugee crisis in the region, with full cooperation of the countries involved and decisive support by the international community, in particular the European Commission, US Administration, OSCE, Council of Europe and its Development Bank.

For the implementation of the Joint Project which is to be presented at a separate meeting during this Conference, it is necessary to collect about € 500 million, for which purpose a donor conference will be organised at the end of April 2012. Therefore, I would like to use this occasion and invite potential donors to support this Project and take part in the donor conference.

Mr. Chairman,

I would also like to once again praise the UNHCR for its comprehensive role in my country and in the entire region for many successive years. Unfortunately, I have to mention that the problem regarding the 200 000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, mostly Serbs- not Albanians, who have found a safe haven in Serbia, still remains open and may start to deteriorate. We support the efforts of the UNHCR, who predominantly deals with issues pertaining to refugees, to continue to deal with this problem in an adequate manner being the Agency which is the cluster lead for IDPs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Republic of Serbia was given a priority status within a framework of reforms of the internal affairs sector, thus initiating the design of the "National Asylum System". The adoption of the Law on Asylum was the first major step in this direction.

One of the most current issues which the countries from our region are facing is **the increase in the number of asylum seekers, which undoubtedly represents a directly consequence of the increase in the number of illegal immigrants. The issue of asylum seekers for Serbia is a multifaceted problem due to the fact that the number of asylum seekers in Serbia has risen drastically as compared to the previous period, and on the other hand we have recorded a great number of Serbian citizens who are submitting asylum applications in the countries of the European Union.**

This problem escalated in the period following the visa liberalization and the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia undertook a series of measures in order to reduce the number of asylum application submitted in Serbia but also in the countries of the EU. The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a measures with a view to enhancing the capacities and providing better conditions for asylum seekers.

When we refer to the stateless persons, the provisions of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness have been implemented into the provisions of the Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Serbia, even in cases when these persons are citizens of some other country.

This implies that the possibility that such persons will remain without the citizenship is eliminated but in addition to the dual citizenship, multiple citizenship is allowed.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia decided to do everything in its power regarding suppression of phenomenon of stateless persons in the region which is in accordance with international conventions it assessed to, as well as through its legislation. Serbia demonstrated the aforementioned through its active participation at the Regional Conference on the provision of civil documentation and registration in South-eastern Europe held in Zagreb on October 26/17 2011, with support of UNHCR, OSCE, High Commissioner for National Minorities and European Commission.

I would like to assure you that the Government of Serbia, in its endeavor to find solutions for a long lasting refugee crisis and problems of internally displaced persons in our own country, will continue to support the efforts of the UNHCR in addressing complex and urgent problems of refugees in the World.

Thank you!