



***Check against delivery***

**Remarks by the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
as delivered by Mr. Seymur Mardaliyev,  
Counselor of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UNOG in Geneva**

**Agenda item 2 (b): Update on UNHCR's engagement with internally displaced persons  
75<sup>th</sup> session of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High  
Commissioner's Programme**

**Geneva, 18 June 2019**

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, we would like to join others in extending our appreciation to Mr. Volker Türk for his dedication and energy he displayed to the displacement cause in his 30 years long tenure with the UNHCR. We wish you all the best in your new important mission in the Office of the UN Secretary General.

My delegation also thanks Director of the Division of International Protection for presenting the update on UNHCR's engagement with internally displaced persons.

There is a growing understanding that internal displacement has significant effects on economic and social development as well as peace and security in affected countries which underscores a need to reassess international approach to IDPs and particularly how UN can engage from a whole-of-system perspective. We should also boldly recognize that internal displacement in many, if not most, cases is a source for subsequent onward journeys. Without the right and timely protection for IDPs today, tomorrow they may become refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Although the international refugee protection is a cornerstone of UNHCR's mandate, we believe it should remain to be actively engaged with internal displacement upon the consent of the concerned countries and closely cooperating with them. For us, it is only natural to see Agency's engagement with IDPs given UNHCR's valuable expertise accumulated for more than 45 years of its operational involvement with internal displacement in many parts of the world. Moreover, it has never been more needed like now given the global magnitude and complexity of the internal displacement.

Azerbaijan commends UNHCR's commitment to working more systematically across the entire spectrum of displacement including through more predictable, decisive and meaningful engagement with IDPs. We see added value of Agency's efforts to update its policy on internal displacement as it is absolutely necessary to further improve the Agency's capacity to respond to the IDP situations through streamlined internal decision-making, better preparedness and early engagement, consistent programming and mobilizing required resources. Benefiting from this dialogue, my delegation would appreciate UNHCR's clarifications to the following points: 1) when do you plan to complete this exercise on the policy update; 2) which measures have been taken or will be taken in terms of building the staff's competencies to coordinate emergency responses in mixed situations.

At the same time, the protracted nature of these situations should receive the attention it deserves. GP20 plan of action opens favorable opportunities for galvanizing the attention in terms of addressing protracted internal displacement and driving durable solutions for IDPs. UNHCR has to play a more active catalyst role in attracting the attention to the protracted situations.

We are grateful to UNHCR for its long-standing engagement with internal displacement in Azerbaijan hosting one of the largest IDP populations per capita in the world – 800 000 in a country of 10 million which is the tragic consequence of the ethnic cleansing and ongoing occupation of the one fifth of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan by neighboring Armenia.

In the meantime, the scale of the Agency's engagement with IDPs in Azerbaijan has been decreasing over the years due to the fact that Government of Azerbaijan assumed the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting displaced population in the country. About 300 000 IDPs have been so far provided by the national authorities with new houses in 103 newly established residential complexes. In 2018 alone, the national authorities improved living conditions for 5800 IDP families in another two large IDP settlements constructed. More than 6 billion USD were invested in the last 25 years to address social problems of displaced population which has resulted in significant decrease of poverty and unemployment. Yet, 400,000 IDPs continue to live under difficult conditions in old and unsuitable houses pending their relocation.

However, one has to stress that these are interim measures since the return to places of IDP's origin is regarded to be the only acceptable and durable solution by the international community and IDPs themselves. Around 6700 IDPs have exercised their right to a voluntary return in safety and dignity to their native lands liberated by Azerbaijan from the Armenian occupation in April 2016 after the comprehensive rehabilitation of those territories.

Azerbaijan is open to sharing its lessons learned and good practices in the development and implementation of law and policy as well as strengthening institutional capacities in addressing internal displacement with all interesting stakeholders on a bilateral basis or through UNHCR.

In closing, we reiterate Azerbaijan's support to all efforts to raise the visibility to the suffering of IDPs and reaffirm our full support to UNHCR's continuous engagement with internal displacement in the months and years ahead.

I thank you.