

Press Release

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Internally displaced persons are "Europe's forgotten people" says PACE Rapporteur

Baku, 08.05.2009 – "It is a shame for Europe that 15 to 20 years after the conflicts ravaged the region of South Caucasus in the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of people displaced by these conflicts continue to live in shabby and marginalised conditions with little prospect of return or restitution of their property", said Mr John Greenway (United Kingdom, EDG), Rapporteur on Protecting the human rights of long-term displaced persons, at the close of his four-day fact-finding mission to Yerevan and Baku. "The international community must reinvigorate its efforts to find new political impetus to create durable solutions for these people. We should avoid them becoming Europe's forgotten people".

Elaborating on his impressions after meetings with Azerbaijani authorities and representatives of the civil society and after having visited a temporary collective accommodation centre as well as a new residential settlement for IDPs in Baku, the Rapporteur recognised the substantial progress that the Government of Azerbaijan was making in terms of improving the living conditions of IDPs. "Nonetheless, much more remains to be done in providing adequate housing for all those hundreds of thousands of displaced persons continuing to live in sub-standard conditions, a fact that the Government acknowledges. Also, greater efforts are required to address the vulnerabilities of these persons, their access to employment, quality education or basic services, and psychological health and needs."

"Providing new housing does not preclude the IDPs right to voluntary return to their homes", continued Mr Greenway. "All IDPs we talked to made it clear that this was their ultimate desire. I urge the Council of Europe and the international community at large to give a new impetus for finding a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Emphasis must be put on the safe return of the peaceful population".

Meanwhile, he encouraged the Azerbaijani authorities, together with the international community, to carefully study and plan the costs, reconstruction needs, public awareness and psychological preparedness of the potential returnees, should conditions open for the return of these people. "The international community has a particular role to play in providing help in clearing these areas of mine-fields", he added.

The Rapporteur also expressed concern over the status and protection provided to persons arriving in Azerbaijan in plight of conflicts in the neighbouring regions. "Economic prosperity has made Azerbaijan attractive as a country of destination. Many of those arriving from North Caucasus, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan or other countries have no legal status and receive little support. Temporary protection measures should be provided and the principles of non-refoulement guaranteed whenever applicable. The international community should shoulder efforts of capacity building in working out effective asylum procedures in Azerbaijan".

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