



## **Press Release**

### **Stronger institutional response needed to address problems of 206,879 internally displaced people in Serbia, says Belgrade conference**

BELGRADE, 29 March 2007 – A one-day conference on internally displaced persons (IDPs) concluded today that a stronger and more co-ordinated institutional response is needed to provide full respect for human rights to Serbia's 206,879 IDPs from Kosovo.

The conference presented an "Analysis of the Situation of Internally Displaced Persons from Kosovo in Serbia – Law and Practice", a joint inter-agency effort of the UNHCR, the OSCE Mission to Serbia, and Praxis non-governmental organization.

"Serbia lacks a more comprehensive and harmonized institutional response to the situation of IDPs," says Hannelore Valier, Head of the OSCE Mission's Democratization Department. "The OSCE Mission and its partners work to foster adoption and implementation of laws and policies that will enable full implementation of internationally guaranteed IDPs rights."

The analysis provides the Serbian authorities with a set of recommendations identifying gaps in the legal system and proposing solutions to alleviate everyday problems of the IDPs. The aim is to ensure that the IDPs are guaranteed effective access to basic civil, political, social and economic rights, such as a right to housing, health protection, documentation, etc.

UNHCR Representative in Serbia, Lennart Kotsalainen, stressed that UNHCR is "advocating on behalf of norms, standards and principles of international human rights and humanitarian law" and that it is "ready to assist the Government and other stakeholders as in the last 15 years of the conflict in former Yugoslavia".

The report also focuses on the situation of certain vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of IDPs, such as Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptians. It touches on the problem of persons originating from Kosovo who are being returned from Western Europe on the basis of readmission agreements.

*Internal displacement is a wide-spread phenomenon in the OSCE region affecting around 3,000,000 people in 13 countries. The OSCE emphasises the importance of prevention of the situation which may lead to mass flows of refugees and IDPs by addressing the root*

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*causes of displacement and involuntary migration. UNHCR's involvement with IDPs worldwide and in Serbia in particular is multi-faceted: from the immediate humanitarian assistance and improvement of living conditions to provision of free legal assistance and advocacy.*