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## **Closing Statement by High Commissioner António Guterres, Concluding Meeting of the CIS Conference Process**

Geneva, 10 October 2005

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I regret that I was not able to be with you this morning at the opening of this important meeting, but I am very happy to be here for its concluding session.

I know that today's deliberations were preceded by intensive consultations which have led to the adoption of a Concluding Statement.

Like the Programme of Action adopted in 1996, the Concluding Statement is not just a fine-sounding declaration. It affirms principles, assesses needs and embodies a common understanding. It expresses the willingness to continue working together on the complex issues of involuntary displacement and protection in the post-Soviet space.

Allow me to share with you some reflections on the significance of the process we are concluding and on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

We are dealing with a vast and complex region of the world. The area encompassed by the CIS countries is enormous, stretching from the borders of the EU in the west to China and Japan in the far east, from Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Mongolia in the south, to Finland, Norway, and even the USA.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly-independent countries were simply not prepared or equipped to respond to the myriad patterns of involuntary displacement and migration. Millions of people had been uprooted. Some moved involuntarily while others were trapped in limbo by so-called frozen conflicts. This incredible mix of population displacement included refugees, internally displaced persons, deported groups, stateless persons, involuntary resettlers, and ecological and irregular migrants. The fledgling post-Soviet states turned to the international community for help and the United Nations General Assembly backed the requests through a number of Resolutions.

In the mid 1990s, the organizers of the CIS Conference recognized that the nature of displacement and forced migration problems in the region were such that they affected the stability of the broader neighbourhood. UNHCR, IOM and OSCE initiated and supported a multilateral dialogue among a number of actors, including Governments and NGOs, to identify problems and solutions. This resulted in the development of a comprehensive and forward-looking regional approach to assist the newly independent countries. The Council of Europe subsequently became a fourth lead agency, and NGO lead agencies also came forward to help guide the process. My thanks to all these partners for their valuable contributions.

For UNHCR, the CIS Conference was a pioneering event for other reasons, too. In 1996, my predecessor Sadako Ogata noted that the distinction between refugee movements and migration was becoming blurred and that protection and

migration issues in general were increasingly interrelated. She announced that UNHCR would be taking a new approach in the CIS region by working with IOM to coordinate and support activities on the asylum-migration nexus. The close partnership with the OSCE was born of the need she saw to provide protection and assistance to IDPs and other involuntarily displaced populations, and to focus attention on the human dimension of conflicts.

Much has been achieved as a result of this remarkable ten-year multilateral effort. States are certainly much more capable of managing displacement and migration problems in a humane, effective manner that is consistent with international standards.

Gaps still remain, however, especially when it comes to implementation. Asylum and protection procedures are in some cases fragile or absent. And new challenges have emerged in the form of heightened concerns for security, terrorism, border management, and a rise in regional migration, human trafficking, and xenophobia.

These issues require continuing cooperation and consultation among countries in the region, in the neighbourhood, and with the international community at large. In other words, what we need is an updated comprehensive regional approach to the challenges, both old and new, of displacement, migration and protection.

I would like to clarify what we mean by this. From the outset, the organizers of the CIS Conference made it clear that they did not view the CIS area as a monolithic region. Looking ahead today we are aware too of the need to distinguish between issues that are common to all countries involved and those that require differentiated approaches. The latter category includes the obligation to work more closely with neighbouring countries and to include them in a broader flexible framework for Euro-Asian cooperation on displacement, asylum and migration.

But this presupposes that the interest, will and commitment are there on the part of the countries themselves. They must be prepared to assume ownership of a new process. Interested international organizations – such as my Office – and other countries can assist you, but we need to know that our partnership corresponds to your needs and priorities. We are thus encouraged by the strong interest which the CIS countries have shown in this Concluding Meeting and the next chapter. The fact that the Russian Federation has contributed financially to ensure the momentum of the last decade is not lost is also very welcome.

The range and complexity of issues that need to be addressed in the displacement, asylum and migration spheres in the broader Euro-Asian neighbourhood are beyond the scope of any single actor. What is needed is a partnership of international actors with the relevant interests and expertise, including developmental agencies and financial institutions. This will require strong political and financial support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the time since the CIS Conference process got underway, several new initiatives and interlocutors have joined the scene. These include the Soderkoping Cross Border Cooperation Process, involving the countries on the EU's new eastern border; the European Neighbourhood Policy; the Issyk-Kul Dialogue; IOM's technical and consultative Joint Consultations on Migration; and the recent redirection of the Budapest Group's Activities toward the CIS region. The

additional fora bring opportunities for new partnerships. We should ensure that next steps are characterized by productive collaboration based on a realistic assessment of gaps, a rational division of labour, and the lessons provided by the CIS Conference process. UNHCR looks forward to playing a proactive and constructive role in this endeavour.

Today, we close a remarkable chapter. Countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia have built the capacity to manage involuntary and regular migration flows, establish asylum systems and improve the situation of other displaced populations. Important laws and structures have been put in place through concentrated capacity building efforts. A tradition of inter-governmental cooperation has been established, and countries have been brought into the mainstream of international norms and practices relating to refugees, migration and displacement.

Most importantly, these efforts have benefited millions of people. For a significant number of them, they have made a life-changing difference. It is up to all of us now to build on what has been achieved and to chart the way forward together, in the spirit of understanding and cooperation that was the hallmark of the exemplary CIS Conference process.

Thank you.