

**Report of the
Fifth Meeting of the Steering Group in the Follow-Up to the
Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees,
Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees
In the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and
Relevant Neighboring States**

(Geneva, 13-14 July 2000)

Introduction

On 13-14 July 2000, the Steering Group met at its last, fifth, session to review the achievements of the CIS Conference process in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted in 1996, areas necessitating further attention, and to take a decision on the future activities. The latter was required in accordance with paragraph 149 of the Programme of Action, which stated that "the meeting of the year 2000 should conclude the process, and the Steering Group would decide then on any further appropriate follow-up."

41 states, 3 observers, 11 intergovernmental organizations, 4 other entities and 126 non-governmental organizations participated in the event (total number of participants was 334).

Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, Assistant High Commissioner at UNHCR, Mr. Brunson McKinley, Director General of IOM and Mr. Andreas Halbach, Regional Representative of IOM, and Mr. Knut Langeland, Chargé d'Affaires a. i. of Norway, in the capacity as member of the OSCE Troika, co-chaired the meeting. Opening statements were made by the three co-chairs, as well as by representatives of other supporting organizations: Mr. Peter Eicher, First Deputy Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and Mr. Alexey Kozhemyakov, Head of Department of Public Law of the Council of Europe.

The Steering Group was convened to consider the results of the Working Group, which was established to address the issue of the follow-up to the 1996 Conference in accordance with the recommendation of the Steering Group meeting at its fourth session (June 1999). Over the last year, representatives of the CIS, other interested states and parties, relevant international organisations and non-governmental organisation representatives have gathered to discuss how to proceed with follow-up activities to the Conference process after the year 2000.

As recommended by the fourth session of the Steering Group, an "Assessment Report of the Conference Process (1996-2000)" was prepared and considered by the Working Group. The document evaluated achievements made during the Conference process,

and highlighted areas where work was still required. It was made available in due course to all members of the Steering Group.

The Assessment Report also served as a basis for defining how the Conference process should be carried out beyond the year 2000. The views of the CIS governments, other interested states, non-governmental organizations and other parties have been taken into due account while finalizing the "Report and Recommendations for Follow-Up to the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States."

This document was adopted by consensus at this Steering Group session. It determines four broad thematic and four structural issues that will represent the focus of future follow-up activities. It has also been decided that the official title of the future process will be "Follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference on the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Migration and Asylum Issues." This process will last for five years from 2000, subject to modification by the participants depending on progress made in the implementation of programmes and activities related to the Programme of Action.

A joint Conference Room Paper of UNHCR, IOM, OSCE and the Council of Europe outlining preliminary vision of this thematic approach was made available to the participants.

Opening Remarks and Presentations

Mr. Jessen-Petersen, Assistant High Commissioner at UNHCR in his opening remarks reviewed the original objectives of the Conference and the follow-up process' achievements in the implementation of the Programme of Action over the past four years. The states concerned have recognized the broad-based benefits of the process in seeking to come to grips with the complex issues of population displacement in the region. National security considerations and regional stability are both increasingly linked to population displacement.

Some measure of progress in a variety of fields can be claimed, however this has not always been translated into solutions for large numbers of affected populations. Several conflicts remain unresolved and their root causes persist.

An important aspect of the CIS Conference process has been the fact that it contributed significantly to making the NGO sector a vibrant part of the civil society.

A further noteworthy development has been the operational partnerships developed and reinforced between international organizations, including IOM, the OSCE, ODIHR, the Council of Europe and UNHCR.

Continued support to the future process is particularly crucial in keeping on track joint efforts to pre-empt and manage population movements in the region. The Assistant High Commissioner said that one successful outcome of the Conference process often overlooked was the absence of dramatic developments to the contrary. The process

helped demonstrate how humanitarian action through a comprehensive approach can contribute to regional stability.

The main challenge while entering a new phase in the process is to consolidate consensus built up over the four last years, by translating it into further practical action in the four thematic areas outlined in the Recommendations submitted to the Steering Group.

Mr. Halbach, Regional Representative of IOM, in his intervention on behalf of the Director General emphasized that the Conference process has been a unique and innovative response to a range of critical problems arising from population movements and migration challenges in the region. The Assessment Report has identified the successes and shortcomings, the lessons learned and opportunities missed, which are also reflected in the Report and Recommendations. The task ahead is to consolidate the achievements and render them sustainable, to refocus on areas where progress has been less significant or where priorities have since changed. He stressed that it is only a logical next step that the region itself takes a more active role in initiating, managing and sustaining a dialogue among countries concerned.

The problem of illegal migration is of growing significance and concern to the countries of the region, and beyond. Building on the achievements made to date, IOM plans, during next five years, to assist the countries of the region to put in place effective, rational and humane migration management systems which are compatible with each other and with internationally acknowledged standards and best practices, - systems that focus on the major migration challenges affecting the economic development and stability of states, and the human rights of migrants.

IOM's mandate and experience to date places it in a good position to be lead agency for the migration management theme, with a particular focus on the issue of illegal migration, and to contribute actively to other themes as they intersect with migration management and other areas of concern to IOM. IOM, in close cooperation with UNHCR, OSCE, other international agencies and NGOs, will continue to provide capacity building and other types of assistance in a number of areas of mutual interest.

Mr. Langeland of Norway in its capacity as member of the OSCE Troika delivered a statement, in which the following main points were emphasized. The Conference process had established a space for cooperation on migration and displacement in the region, and there was a broad consensus to continue the consultative and networking process. The Assessment Report confirmed that the Conference process had been a valuable instrument and had achieved many positive results.

If the future follow-up is to be successful, the partnership among all parties concerned will have to be renewed. The OSCE is clearly part of such a partnership. With reference to the Istanbul Summit of the OSCE (November 1999) and the Charter for European Security, Mr. Langeland emphasized a need for a strengthened contribution of the OSCE to meet the risks and challenges facing the OSCE area and to improve human security. The Charter also addresses questions related to refugees and IDPs. These and many other issues, which are to be addressed in the follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference are relevant to the OSCE's mandate and the field of competence.

Mr. Eicher, First Deputy Director of the ODIHR pointed out that the Conference follow-up has been an important undertaking, and one to which the ODIHR has attached a significant priority as it developed its programmes and activities. The ODIHR had successfully integrated many of recommendations of the Geneva Conference into the mainstream of the Office's core functions and activities, and added a number of elements. Mr. Eicher also provided an account of those activities.

He further drew the attention to a number of challenges ahead such as implementation of legislation, the question of border and visa regimes, IDPs, trafficking in human beings. The ODIHR will take an active part in the future follow-up, with the focus on thematic issues.

Mr. Kozhemyakov of the Council of Europe said that the Council of Europe maintained a continuous interest in the process. This interest has been growing in parallel with the increase in the number of member states from the region (Armenia and Azerbaijan have joined the Council most recently). The problems of refugees, displaced persons, migration and asylum issues are one of the Council of Europe's priorities.

Numerous and diverse activities of the Council for the CIS countries are dealing with practically all four topics on the agenda. The Council of Europe appreciated the recommendations presented to the Steering Group with due respect to the Council of Europe's role and ownership, together with other key agencies in the follow-up process, and intends to continue its contribution in the form that previously proved to be the most effective: intergovernmental committees, ADACS, Parliamentary Assembly, etc. The Organization remains fully committed to the objectives of the process. It was also stressed that the role of a lead agency in the future process should be clearer defined, including issues of budgetary and extra-budgetary resources and others, in order to be able to carry out the lead role effectively.

Mr. Bijleveld, Director of the Bureau for Europe (UNHCR) briefed the meeting about the process of the Working Group to address the issue of the follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference that had been established in accordance with the decision of the Steering Group at its session in 1999. The Working Group made an assessment of the Conference process and prepared recommendations for the Steering Group's decision on future activities.

Mr. Bijleveld introduced the draft Report and Recommendation as the key document to be adopted, and provided explanations on the main focus of future work centered on four broad thematic issues. He also drew the participants' attention to a Conference Room paper on the four themes in question prepared and cleared by UNHCR, IOM, OSCE and the Council of Europe. This document represented an attempt by the agencies concerned to look into the substance and mechanism of future work with an identification of proposed lead agencies and areas of responsibility.

The delegation of France on behalf of the EU appreciated accomplishments of the past years after the adoption of the Programme of Action in 1996 and stressed that much still remains to be done, e.g., to sustain the achievements, particularly in the area of the implementation of legislation.

The EU pays continued attention to the issues of migration, asylum, border management in the CIS, and suggested applying regional approach in the search for solutions in these spheres. It is important for the countries concerned to continue dialogue and common reflection, with the assistance of international organizations. Priority should be given to solution of conflicts and the issues of displaced persons should be part of the conflict resolution efforts. Combating trafficking is among the priorities to be tackled.

The EU supported proposals made by the international organizations to put in place a new follow-up mechanism, centered on four themes, which responds to the current priorities. However, it cannot replace the will of the governments to take appropriate effective measures. It should be accompanied by the governments' commitment. The EU suggested to better involving local NGOs in the thematic working groups' process. Their meetings could take place in different CIS countries, and annual review meetings in Geneva.

Governments presentations

The delegation of the **Russian Federation** emphasized that the Programme of Action has become a guiding instrument for the political activities of the states concerned to develop cooperation in the spirit of humanitarian principles agreed upon, as well as interaction of states in strengthening pan-European security, a major aspect of which remains the solution of migration problems. Impressive progress has been achieved, however it would be premature to say that the Programme has been implemented fully and successfully.

Among issues requiring further attention and international support were mentioned illegal migration and the lack of adequately developed legal regulatory base for that, gaps between the existing legislation and the law enforcement practices, the lack of financial resources particularly hindering the realization of plans to adequately address the problems of refugees and asylum seekers, the need to strengthen the NGOs capacities. Hopes have been expressed with regard to a more active role in the process of the World Bank, EBRD, UNDP and other financial institutions and international organizations.

Russia supported the proposal to extend the follow-up period for another 5 years and reaffirmed its commitment to the international humanitarian principles embodied in the Programme of Action. It is extremely important to maintain the dynamics and pragmatism of the Geneva process that should be led by UNHCR, IOM and the OSCE. The Russian Federation upheld the themes and the proposed implementation mechanism as listed in the Report and Recommendations.

The **Ukrainian** delegation provided a detailed account of accomplishments in the implementation of the Programme of Action, particularly with regard to solutions of problems of formerly deported Crimean Tatars, including the issue of their citizenship and reduction of statelessness, as well as the development of national refugee legislation and improving cooperation with national NGOs.

In light of Ukraine's strategy of integration into European structures, the need to harmonize policies and legislation in the area of migration with the countries of Central and Western Europe is becoming increasingly essential.

Ukraine fully supported recommendations for future activities considering them as a good basis for further work.

The delegation of **Belarus** noted that the experience of the implementation of migration policy by CIS countries has conclusively proved the appropriateness of the strategy provided for in the Programme of Action and the entire Conference process. A number of refugee/migration challenges faced by Belarus were highlighted, including those related to Chernobyl disaster. Social protection and health care of the affected populations resettled from the contaminated area are considered as the priorities of the national policy. The inclusion of the thematic issue of groups of concern as a focus for future activities was particularly appreciated. It is hoped that the appropriate funding needs would be taken into account by the international community.

The policy conducted by Belarus in the sphere of migration attests to the adherence of the country to the standards and principles of international law, observance and protection of human rights. Preparatory work is currently underway for the accession to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

The delegation drew particular attention to the issue of illegal migration and efforts being deployed by the Government to prevent and curb this phenomenon (e.g., during 1999, the State Border Troops and the Ministry of Interior detained 170 organized groups of illegal migrants consisting of 1,312 people and uncovered more than 160 channels of incoming and outgoing trafficking). In this connection an appeal was made for better cooperation and burden sharing in dealing with this issue.

Belarus expressed its commitment to participate in the follow-up to the Conference process while counting on the proper international assistance to help effectively resolve the problems of protecting vulnerable groups of migrants and managing migration processes as a whole as efficiently as possible.

The representative of **Turkmenistan** briefed the meeting in detail on his country's achievements in the process, including the accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the adoption of national refugee legislation, cooperation with UNHCR, IOM and other international organizations, and particularly in international peace building efforts. In the recent years, an impetus was given to national NGO development. Turkmenistan stands ready to provide available facilities for future meeting events that may take place.

The delegation of **Kazakhstan** pointed out to the achievements of the Conference process in general, and more specifically in the country, with the emphasis on the area of legislation. The issue of harmonization of migration legislation and policies is important. Kazakhstan is now at the final stage of internal preparations to the accession to the Convention Relating to the Status of the Stateless Persons of 1954 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961.

Against the background of many achievements, the Programme of Action also faced difficulties during its implementation, e.g. in the sphere of early warning and prevention. One of the most significant impediments was the lack of financial resources. The latter combined with other problems related to the deficiency in well-trained personnel and sometimes lengthy and complicated procedures did not allow to adequately addressing problems that are related to the integration of ethnic Kazakh returnees. International organizations have been invited to better cooperate and coordinate activities in order to avoid duplication and achieve more significant results.

Kazakhstan confirmed its adherence to the objectives of the Programme of Action and supported the continuation of the follow-up process. However, among the four suggested themes Kazakhstan favored the theme related to continued focus on the groups of concern.

The delegation of **Sweden** highlighted a few matters of particular interest, in addition to the statement by the Presidency of the European Union. Sweden has supported the Conference through financial contributions and political backing and will give high priority to its follow-up. The CIS Conference has become a significant regional instrument in the migration policy field. Among other achievements, the essential involvement of civil society has been strengthened. The importance of implementing legislation and avoiding implementation and legislation gaps has been stressed.

A number of expectations in the future were also highlighted, e.g., the need for improved interagency cooperation, coordination and mainstreaming, the identification, in the working groups, of benchmarks and assessment standards in order to better address migration issues common to both Europe and the CIS region, the analysis of transit migration, a systematic discussion on readmission agreements. Sweden considers as a priority the third country dialogue on migration issues with the region, particularly at the time of its Presidency in the EU, half a year from now, and is of the opinion that it also merits a place on the long-term agenda of the EU.

The delegation of **Tajikistan** highlighted the importance of the Tajik Peace Agreement that brought peace, national reconciliation and stability. With the return of practically all Tajik refugees (over 4 000 have been repatriated in 1999), the emphasis is now being placed on concrete issues of rehabilitation, including repatriated refugees and demobilized soldiers. The problem of illegal migration is also becoming increasingly acute in Tajikistan, particularly in relation to known events in Afghanistan, as well as economic migration.

In the course of past years, Tajikistan made significant progress in building legislative base in refugee and migration spheres. The Government adopted (1999) a Concept of the State Migration Policy, and a law on migration. A new situation required amendments to the national refugee legislation passed in 1994. Therefore, a new version of the law on refugees is now undergoing last preparatory stages before the adoption.

The delegation favored a sub-regional approach to the future activities and suggested a number of issues to be discussed. At the same time, Tajikistan remained open to bilateral and multilateral cooperation with all interested countries and international

organizations. Recommendations submitted to the Steering Group were fully supported.

The delegation of **Azerbaijan** reiterated the complex displacement problems in the country, which remains a top priority for the Government. A detailed account of the Government's measures related to solutions of problems of displaced persons and to an adequate legislative base was provided. It has been particularly emphasized that a dangerous trend of diminishing humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan has become more apparent. It was also mentioned that among reasons for the aggravating situation of IDPs was the lack of appropriate international instruments.

Azerbaijan appreciated direct international contacts, including with donors, heightened international attention to its displacement challenges, and confirmed its commitment to participate in the follow-up process beyond 2000. However, it should also be stressed that the Conference process did not meaningfully contribute to finding solutions to problems related to involuntary displacement.

Azerbaijan considers it important that consensus has been reached in the Working Group on thematic and structural issues of future follow-up. At the same time, the delegation pointed out that a sub-regional approach remained unacceptable for Azerbaijan, and favored an individual approach to each country and relevant problems while working out strategies for financial assistance. The Geneva Conference process should not hinder direct contacts with donors, nor ultimately cause a decrease in assistance.

The delegation of **Georgia** underscored an international forum provided by the Conference follow-up for the CIS countries to discuss a number of pressing challenges. The Conference also contributed to developing cooperation among countries in the region, establishing national legislation and strengthening appropriate administrative structures. However, a number of provisions of the Programme of Action have not been implemented, especially in relation to IDPs. This remains the most acute problem for the country. Humanitarian and political issues should not be detached from each other while looking for solutions, including IDPs' return to places of their former residence. The delegation also drew the attention to problems of victims of natural disasters.

Georgia supported proposals regarding future directions in the Conference follow-up and suggested establishing a body, similar to the Steering Group that would monitor the process and identify problems as arise in order to find solutions. Review and reporting mechanisms should be clearer defined. One of the priority dimensions of the follow-up should be ensuring external financial support to programmes and projects, with active participation of international financial institutions.

Moldova was pleased that all countries concerned confirmed their commitment to continue the process, and some pleaded for its modification. Moldova suggested that the future process should have better linkages with Western and Central Europe, and in this connection welcomed the structure of flexible participation. The delegation of Moldova updated participants on recently taken measures on refugee and migration issues, in particular in the area of legislation.

The recognition of the necessity to accede to the 1951 Convention is growing in the country, however it is also evident that conditions, primarily economic and social, are not yet adequate to ensure the proper fulfillment of the Government's international obligations under such an international instrument. Meanwhile, the Government will continue to work on the national refugee legislation.

It was pointed out that the funding level during past years was not sufficient. It was hoped that the funding situation in the future would allow international organizations to maintain the quality of their assistance to Moldova. The delegation listed a number of areas, primarily legislation and the situation with IDPs, where there was room for cooperation and assistance to the country by UNHCR, IOM, OSCE and the Council of Europe. The delegation called upon UNHCR to take the lead in IDP issues in the country. It also invited IOM to facilitate border management programmes. Moldova will remain engaged to fully implement commitments to the Programme of Action and the Conference follow-up.

The delegation of the **United States of America** stated that the CIS Conference was an almost unprecedented journey that by now resulted in many lessons learned, much progress achieved and remaining challenges to be addressed.

The following key successes have been acknowledged: creation of a strong NGO sector, the adoption by almost all countries of new migration-related legislation, training of government officials in human rights and refugee law, enhanced partnerships, a solution to statelessness for the Crimean Tatars and accession of a number of states to international instruments on refugees and statelessness.

The US Government fully supported the Report and Recommendations developed by the Working Group. The four thematic issues will help focus efforts and the establishment of Expert Working Group will encourage continued cooperation and coordination among international organizations.

The following issues would deserve particular attention in the future. The CIS governments themselves must take the principle responsibility, which is a basic premise of the Conference process. The natural follow-up to this point is that CIS governments who demonstrate their commitment to the Conference deserve financial support from the international community.

The further development of the NGO community needs particular attention. It requires not only the CIS governments' commitment, but also the international organizations' vigilance in directing programmes to this end. The US Government encouraged UNHCR to maintain the high level of support of NGOs that has been one of the hallmarks of the Conference process.

A number of areas are still requiring greater efforts: conflict prevention and the peaceful resolution of political disputes; greater respect for human rights and the rule of law; better protection of refugees and IDPs; more cooperation on voluntary repatriation; better guarantees of the proper treatment of asylum seekers.

Renewed and new partnerships will help maximize the potential of the Conference activities. The US Government commended UNHCR, IOM and the OSCE for their significant efforts over the last several years.

Finland shared the overall analysis and conclusions of the Report and Recommendations. The delegation saw the Conference process useful and especially highlighted the following achievements: the process has provided a venue for the exchange of ideas and views related to migration, asylum and refugee issues in the region; the working relations between different actors in the process clearly improved. The Programme of Action continues to form a clearly defined political framework for managing asylum and migration related issues.

However remarkable challenges remain to be addressed. In the opinion of the delegation of Finland, these mainly consist of translating protection legislation into norms and regulations, further improving border control and border crossing mechanisms, taking into account international obligations, implementing adequately the standards of treatment of third country citizens.

Finland supported the proposed thematic approach and emphasized the following points: it is essential to clearly define the responsibilities and division of work between different actors; it is very important that the funding for NGOs be safeguarded in the future; the idea of bringing NGOs into the PARinAC process was supported. The delegation encouraged the countries of the region to play an active role in the future follow-up.

The delegate of the Office of the Representative of the Secretary General on IDPs placed the emphasis on the necessity to find solutions for internally displaced persons, one of the categories of concern identified in the Programme of Action, particularly in the South Caucasus. He drew the attention to the "New Approach" developed in Georgia by UNDP, UNHCR, the World Bank, OCHA and endorsed by the Government. A concern was expressed with regard to IDP problems in the North Caucasus.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement constitute a valuable tool towards the realization of the CIS Conference aims, which gained considerable recognition. The representative hoped that the governments in the CIS region and NGOs would further familiarize themselves with the Guiding Principles and review their own actions, national legislation and procedures in their terms. A need for developing effective regional approaches and intensive cooperation to achieve lasting results to the problems of IDPs was stressed.

The delegation of **Kyrgyzstan** listed country specific achievements in the implementation of the Programme of Action, including most recent developments, such as the approval of the Concept of the State Demographic and Migration Policies that placed the stabilization of the migration processes high on the state's agenda.

A number of national priorities for the future have also been highlighted. Amongst them are further efforts to solve the problems of refugees and asylum seekers, the development and implementation of comprehensive programmes of local integration of refugees, combating illegal migration, strengthening international cooperation,

including at a sub-regional level within the Conference process (the Bishkek Migration Management Center could become one of the institutions for promotion of such cooperation), making operational newly established migration and border control services. Staff development and research in the area of migration and refugee issues deserve serious attention.

Kyrgyzstan emphasized progress made in the preparations of the recommendations and in this connection raised several points. The future process should develop at both national and international levels, be closely related to the economic dimensions and sustainable development, provide due attention to stronger preventive measures. Kyrgyzstan is prepared to participate in the Expert Working Groups on groups of concern and on migration management, including combating illegal migration. The Steering Group mechanism has been found useful and it has been suggested to maintain it.

The representative of **Japan** pointed to the support rendered by his country to the CIS Conference since 1996, including financial contributions in the course of last five years to the countries in the region. The delegation of Japan supported the Recommendations, including four thematic issues and a five-year term for future activities. It attached particular importance to progress in the area of prevention. The ownership of the process by the CIS countries and relevant neighboring states was considered key to its success. The importance of the role of NGOs was also mentioned. The Government of Japan is particularly interested in giving more concrete shape to cooperation between major international organizations involved (UNHCR, IOM and the OSCE) at the new stage of the Conference process.

The delegation of **Norway** endorsed the Recommendations submitted to the Steering Group. Continued emphasis on the four thematic areas is necessary to consolidate the results already achieved and ensure further progress in migration management and protection, based on the commitment of the states in the region. Norway will continue its support to the process, including financial contributions. It considers progress in the NGO sector and civil society building as one of the important achievements.

Switzerland appreciated accomplishments of the Conference process as contained in the Assessment Report and supported the Recommendations submitted by the Working Group. In this connection, the delegation of Switzerland considered important that NGOs be recognized and supported in their activities by the states concerned, including by means of appropriate legislative measures.

It would be necessary to clarify modalities of funding of future activities in order to ensure adequate support to the appropriate mechanisms of follow-up and local NGOs. The realization of stated objectives will necessitate the engagement of donors, and Switzerland will assume its part. The delegation described its intentions to support a number of concrete projects in the CIS countries, including on bilateral basis, and invited the states concerned in the region, donors and international organizations to deepen their cooperation.

The delegation of **Armenia** stated that the Programme of Action was and still is a solid base in the search for solutions of problems of migrants and refugees. The Conference process greatly contributed to better understanding of the necessity of

coordinated efforts to improve the migration situation in the region. The meeting was briefed on the Government's recent activities.

As presented by the delegation, the Government priorities now and for the future are mainly focused on the following issues: solution of housing problems; employment and compensation for lost property of refugees as the main impediment to their integration and naturalization; return of IDPs to the places of their origin - border regions; reintegration of Armenian illegal migrants deported from Western Europe; issues related to involuntary displaced persons from a number of CIS countries; problems of asylum seekers, as well as reinforcement of border control. The attention was drawn to the Government's plans and projects in this respect.

It was mentioned that the participation of Armenia in the process would be conditioned by perspectives of reaching solutions to the problems in question. The delegation made several suggestions as to how the future thematic process may work more effectively.

Representatives of the five **NGO thematic Working Groups** on repatriation, resettlement and integration; on emergency assistance; on refugee law and protection; on formerly deported peoples and on conflict management addressed the Steering Group. In their statements, they briefed the Steering Group on their findings, main directions of future activities, major needs in their respective fields of involvement, as well as some suggestions oriented towards improvement of NGO's involvement and their sustainability.

Adoption of recommendations

Under the agenda item 5 - adoption of recommendations for future activities, Mr. A. W. Bijleveld provided some answers and clarifications to a number of queries and comments by the participants with regard to various aspects of the future follow-up process. No further suggestions have been made.

The Steering Group adopted by consensus the Report and Recommendations, as submitted by the Working Group to address the issue of the follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference.

Concluding remarks

Mr. S. Jessen-Petersen, Assistant High Commissioner (UNHCR) made concluding remarks on behalf of the three co-chairpersons.

The Conference process has considerably advanced a number of issues identified in the Programme of Action and met its essential objectives:

- to provide a reliable international forum to discuss population displacement problems,
- to review the population movements taking place in the region,
- to clarify categories of concern,
- to devise an integrated strategy, as well as
- to manage migratory movements.

In addition, it has given impetus to development of the NGO sector and civil society, and forged vital partnerships.

The formal follow-up to the Conference has come to its conclusion at this Steering Group meeting. However, much remains to be done, such as:

- ◆ addressing institutional gaps, including the implementation of legislation and fulfilling international obligations by the states concerned,
- ◆ ensuring concrete assistance and protection to groups of concern in the region and finding durable solutions to their problems,
- ◆ intensifying conflict resolution efforts,
- ◆ ensuring adequate financial support by the international community,
- ◆ consolidating partnerships between international organisations and institutions,
- ◆ sustaining the NGO sector.

A new chapter of more intensive and focused follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference is being now opened. It is very encouraging that all participating countries, organisations and NGOs are unanimous in their desire to continue the Conference process with the aim of contributing to finding reliable and lasting solutions to the existing challenges.

There is a clear agreement that the principles of the Programme of Action will continue to guide all participating parties in dealing with the thematic issues in a concerted and pragmatic manner. The thematic approach was accepted and supported by all participants.

With the adoption of the Recommendations, the Conference process is moving to a more advanced level of co-operation in the search for concrete solutions to problems in four main areas, as identified in the adopted document. The Recommendations create a framework flexible enough for future amendments and adjustments, as they may be needed.

The first practical step in the post-Steering Group period will be further consultations among the lead agencies to devise the work plans for the thematic working groups. The agencies involved will meet in early September to discuss the relevant arrangements. By the end of September, there will be a communication on the outcome of this meeting concerning the next practical steps for the implementation of the thematic activities.

High-level political and adequate financial support and enhanced co-ordination and partnerships, dedication and perseverance will be required to continue the process successfully.

Geneva, 27 July 2000