**Internal Displacement in Azerbaijan**

Internal forced displacement in Azerbaijan is a consequence of the military aggression and ethnic cleansing conducted by Armenia in the territories of Azerbaijan. As a result of this aggression more than a million Azerbaijanis were forcefully displaced from their native lands. The forcefully displaced people in Azerbaijan were temporarily settled in more than 1600 heavily populated settlements in 12 tent camps, villages consisting of railroad cargo-vans, half-constructed buildings and public facilities.

The right of unconditional and safe return of Azerbaijani displaced population was confirmed in dozens of resolutions and decisions of the UN General Assembly, Security Council, OIC, PACE, OSCE, European Court of Human Rights etc. At the same time, international expert community commended Azerbaijan’s progressive measures for assisting effectively its displaced population and setting one of the exemplary practices in this field as the Government of Azerbaijan has assumed full responsibility for improving living conditions of the IDPs. The Government has been implementing the strategy for amelioration of living conditions of the forcefully displaced population, providing them with social assistance and benefits, and constructing of 116 new, compact and modern residential areas for their temporary settlement. We managed to achieve significant progress in improving living conditions of the IDPs by eliminating all tent camps and cargo-van villages and providing more than 320 thousand IDPs living in dire conditions with temporary homes without prejudice to their right to voluntary, safe and dignified return to their native lands. The poverty rate among the IDPs has been reduced from 75 to 8 per cent.

The main priorities of the Government of Azerbaijan after the liberation of its territories from the occupation in 2020 are to clear these territories from mines and other unexploded ordnances, to restore the cities and settlements totally destroyed during the conflict and to create necessary conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return and resettlement of the IDPs. The process of rehabilitation of liberated territories is hindered by heavy landmine contamination and total destruction of the infrastructure. Since the liberation of occupied territories of Azerbaijan in autumn 2020 more than 350 citizens of Azerbaijan became victims of mine explosions, among them many IDPs who were impatient to visit their liberated lands after three decades of forceful separation.

Despite the fact that the reason of internal displacement in Azerbaijan was not climate change but a foreign military occupation, human made ecological problems had been persistent in the territories of displacement during the years of occupation. These territories are not only contaminated by mines and other explosive ordnances but also suffered from deliberate firing, deforestation and cutting of rare species of trees, polluting rivers and other water resources which inflicted widespread environmental damage and today seriously impedes speedy restoration and return process. Elimination of the environmental damage and revival of the liberated Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur regions of Azerbaijan based on the concept of “smart cities” and “green energy zones” is a priority for the Government of Azerbaijan.

As a COP29 host country Azerbaijan has not only made green transition as a national priority but also contributes to the efforts on strengthening global solidarity and inclusivity in addressing climate change. Azerbaijan is determined to make COP29 a champion of efforts to deliver, expand and extend the scope of global pledges on safeguarding the environment.

As a part of efforts to organize planned return and resettlement of the IDPs to their native lands, the Coordination Headquarters was established to resolve socio-economic, humanitarian, organizational and other urgent issues in the territories liberated from the occupation on November 24, 2020. On January 4, 2021, the “Karabakh Revival Fund” was established with the aim to ensure financial support and promote investments for restoration and reconstruction of the territories liberated from the occupation, and to transform the area into a region with sustainable economy.

“The Great Return to the territories liberated from the occupation” is also one of the five national priorities of the Government of Azerbaijan according to the “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development”. It is also closely connected with other national priority on achieving “Clean environment and “green growth” country”. In November 2022 “The first State Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Great Return to the territories liberated from the occupation” was adopted. The main objectives of the program are to provide planned and sustainable resettlement of 140 000 IDPs in the liberated territories and reintegrate these territories to the country’s economy. Until today, planned return of more than 6000 IDPs has been realized.

The State Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the work with Refugees and IDPs takes measures to achieve a flexible, effective and transparent implementation of the Great Return. Within the framework of the project “The first step” for the return of IDPs to the liberated territories and their sustainable resettlement, the electronic management system “Return and reintegration” was finalized. Registration of IDPs was digitalized and a single database was formed on its basis and integrated with the databases of other government agencies within “e-government”. The unified electronic database, where data on each IDP is collected, has improved the flexibility and efficiency of the Committee’s work. The information on the status of IDPs and relevant certificates, provision of allowances, utility payments was separately digitalized. The citizens have been enabled to obtain a certificate on IDP status from the electronic system *my.gov.az*. The electronic platform ”Return and reintegration" has been further improved by including information obtained on the basis of surveys conducted by the Committee among the IDPs on their wish to return to their lands with the purpose of organizing planned and voluntary return.

Today, after the liberation of the occupied territories heavy contamination of these lands with mines and other explosive ordnances and total destruction of infrastructure and property of the IDPs are the main obstacles for the safe and dignified return of the IDPs to their native lands. In this regard, active engagement of the international donor community and development agencies to post-conflict demining and rebuilding efforts, as well as advocacy for sustainable peace and reconstruction are important. We think that these issues demand special attention and advocacy of the Special Rapporteur.