



General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 November 1998
English
Original: Russian

Fifty-third session

Third Committee

Agenda item 105

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Letter dated 17 November 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that for technical reasons the delegation of Azerbaijan was unable to speak on agenda item 105 during its consideration by the Third Committee at the current session of the General Assembly.

In that connection, I have the honour to transmit the text of the statement by the delegation of Azerbaijan (see annex), and to request you to have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 105.

(Signed) Eldar **Kouliev**
Permanent Representative

Annex

Statement by the delegation of Azerbaijan on agenda item 105, “Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions”, delivered to the Third Committee at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly

Azerbaijan, as a State with about a million refugees and internally displaced persons on its soil, believes that one of the fundamental aspects in the joint efforts by the States Members of the United Nations is the most rapid possible resolution of internal and international armed conflicts by peaceful means and the return of the millions of refugees to their places of permanent residence. Coordination of the international community's efforts in this direction should come from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In 1988, 1989 and 1990, Azerbaijan took in about 200,000 Azerbaijani refugees fleeing ethnic cleansing in Armenia. As a result of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan, over 20 per cent of our country fell under occupation and 800,000 citizens were forced to move to other regions and towns in Azerbaijan. For Azerbaijan's population of seven and a half million, a million refugees and internally displaced persons is a catastrophic figure. Armenia's continuing aggression against and blockade of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic prevents a solution to the problem of return of the refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of permanent residence. At the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Summit in Lisbon in 1996, the world community recognized three principles on whose basis the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia should be solved by peaceful means and the refugees and internally displaced persons should be guaranteed a safe return to their places of permanent residence. We hope that the international organizations will provide us with the necessary support to achieve peace between the two States and the most rapid return possible of the refugees and the internally displaced persons to their homes.

We fully approve of the practice that UNHCR has of working together with international and humanitarian organizations such as OSCE and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We particularly note the fact that UNHCR staff are doing their jobs in the “line of fire” and that the courage they have shown in providing humanitarian assistance to refugees in countries where military operations have taken place has helped save thousands of lives. Azerbaijan cooperates closely with UNHCR: the cooperation agreement between UNHCR and the Government of Azerbaijan, which was signed in 1995, and the State programme of assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons have laid a firm foundation for improving their situation in Azerbaijan. UNHCR staff in Azerbaijan are continuing to provide comprehensive assistance to the refugees, while the Government is implementing measures to provide material assistance and provide preferential terms for refugees and internally displaced persons: in Azerbaijan, they are exempt from all forms of taxation and receive a monthly financial and material allowance and free education and health care, while construction of camps for them is continuing. This month, President Aliyev spoke at an expanded Cabinet meeting in favour of improving the work of the State committee for refugee affairs in matters to do with material, social and cultural provision for refugees and internally displaced persons.

However, we note with regret that in neither of her two statements in the Security Council and in the Third Committee of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session did the

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ms. Ogata, touch upon the refugee situation in the Transcaucasus, in particular the million refugees and internally displaced persons in Azerbaijan, although her deputy, Mr. Soren Jessen-Petersen, recently spent some time in Azerbaijan and acquainted himself fully with the situation there. We believe that in the absence of a solution to the armed conflict in the Transcaucasus, UNHCR must not discontinue its activities in the region and must continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the refugees and internally displaced persons there to at least the same extent as in previous years. We particularly thank the donor States, whose assistance, which has been provided since the moment Azerbaijan became independent, has enabled us to stand our ground in the face of aggression and will help also in the return of the refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of permanent residence and into reconstruction of their homes which were destroyed in the war.
