



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# **Statement on Durable Solutions: Residency, Voluntary Return and Resettlement**

As delivered by Knox Thames,  
to the Supplemental Human Dimension Meeting on  
Internally Displaced Persons, Session 2  
Vienna, November 5, 2004

Thank you, Madam Moderator. Voluntary return, resettlement and reintegration are the three linchpins of any plan to create durable solutions and eventual self-reliance for internally displaced populations. Yet often the response by governing authorities and the international community is inadequate or inconsistent. The United States therefore supports comprehensive planning by governments, in consultation with IDPs, civil society and the international community, to enhance the return, resettlement and reintegration process. Displaced persons should be offered a durable solution by which they can return in safety and in dignity.

For voluntary returns to occur, provision of protection and security must be a priority. The United States was greatly troubled by the March violence in Kosovo, which has greatly impacted the perception of security for IDPs. Kosovar authorities at both the central and local level must do more to create an environment that facilitates sustainable returns and provides protection to all communities in Kosovo, regardless of ethnicity. Physical security also remains a concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Once satisfactory security conditions are established, resettlement is the next piece of a durable and lasting solution. First, governments must ensure that their policies facilitate resettlement and remove any bureaucratic obstacles to return. For instance, the Government of Turkey is working with the international community and the UN Special Representative on IDPs to improve return mechanisms. The United States hopes this cooperation with international organizations and local NGOs will continue, as future return programs would benefit by clarifying return, resettlement and reintegration options and circulating that information widely among IDP populations and local NGOs.

However, a significant obstacle to security and resettlement in southeastern Turkey is the continued presence of the village guard system. As the European Commission documented, over 58,000 village guards remain on duty. In addition, village guards continue to occupy the property of IDPs, blocking their ability to return home. Human Rights Watch reported that village guards allegedly murdered six returnees in 2004, thereby increasing the fear of reprisals. The village guard system should therefore be

demobilized and dismantled, as it has proven to be one hindrance to large scale returns. The United States is willing to work with our Turkish friends to develop a plan of action.

In the Balkans, bureaucratic obstacles continue to hinder firm resettlement. In Croatia, bureaucratic procedures remain an obstacle to minority returns at the local level. We urge all levels of the Croatian government to embrace the positive statements by Prime Minister Sanader and to create a welcoming environment for all returnees, regardless of ethnicity. IDPs in Serbia and Montenegro must navigate complex and time-consuming procedures to apply for their personal documents and citizenship papers. This can only occur through the relocated registry office overseeing their municipality of origin, rather than by government offices in their current area of residence. If individuals in Serbia are without these documents, or were never officially registered, as is often the case with Romani IDPs, they are denied access to education, healthcare and welfare benefits. Re-registration of IDPs in Serbia and Montenegro and reform of administrative procedures may help overcome these obstacles.

Reintegration is the last component of any strategy to effectively reincorporate IDPs into society. If this is to be sustainable, IDPs must consequently enjoy the full exercise of their civil and political rights, including recognition of their right to political participation, voting rights in particular, as well as access to education and employment. Authorities should engage IDPs in planning and implementing programs in these areas and work to provide reconstruction assistance. In this regard, the United States is pleased that the Georgian Government agreed to remove legal obstacles to IDP integration through the reform of the election code. Georgia now allows IDPs to vote and run for office.

While the primary responsibility for the welfare and protection of IDPs lies with respective governing authorities, authorities should also facilitate the work of international and non-governmental agencies. International organizations provide humanitarian assistance and work to empower IDPs to become productive contributors to the economic and social progress of their communities. Governments should minimize bureaucratic obstacles that hinder IO/NGO communication networks, remove unwieldy administrative requirements, and endeavor to bring security back to the region in question.

The United States, for humanitarian reasons and in the interest of regional stability, therefore encourages all participating States with IDP populations to adopt laws and policies on internal displacement that are consistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and OSCE commitments. The United States also urges OSCE institutions to provide technical assistance. To this end, the U.S. Government, through USAID, has developed a comprehensive policy to guide U.S. assistance towards IDPs, and is willing to play a constructive role to improve the protection of displaced populations.