

Statement by Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic States: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden at the UNGA debate on the “Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia”

Mister President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Baltic and the Nordic States: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Lithuania.

Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Republic of Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Firstly, we avail ourselves of this opportunity to reiterate our strong support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. Unfortunately, the territorial integrity of Georgia continues to be violated by the Russian Federation, occupying Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia.

It is a deplorable fact that Russia remains in a serious breach of the EU-mediated Ceasefire Agreement of 12 August 2008 and the implementing measures of 8 September 2008. Russia continues its illegal military presence and activities on the Georgian soil and strengthens its control over parts of Georgia’s territory, as seen, inter alia, from the last year’s decision to create a so-called ‘common socio-economic space’ between Russia and the Georgian region of Abkhazia.

Moreover, in its landmark judgment of January 21, 2021, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights has clearly stated that while in effective control of the illegally occupied Georgian territory, Russia is responsible for grave human rights violations committed there. It includes administrative practice of the killing of civilians, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, violation of the right to liberty and security, as well as violations of the right to freedom of movement and respect for private and family life.

This important ruling reminds us that so far, more than a decade after the first adoption of the resolution on internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region /South Ossetia in Georgia, no progress has been achieved with regard to

the voluntary, safe, dignified and unhindered return of IDPs and refugees on the basis of international law and internationally recognized principles. Hundreds of thousands of IDPs continue to be deprived of their right to a safe, dignified and voluntary return to their places of origin and their property rights.

The same conclusion is drawn in the Secretary General's comprehensive report on the implementation of the last year's resolution on IDPs and refugees from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region /South Ossetia in Georgia (A/75/891). We fully concur with findings of this thorough analysis.

The resolution that is tabled today commits us all to continue working for the protection and assistance to those who have been forcibly displaced from the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia regions of Georgia, and to ensure that they are able to exercise their fundamental right to safe and dignified return.

In this context, we commend the continued efforts by the Georgian Government, in close co-operation with international organizations, implementing alternative durable solutions that provide the opportunities for IDPs to integrate locally or, in separate cases, resettle elsewhere in the country, in the absence of the option for IDPs to return to the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia regions of Georgia. We also highlight the strive of the Government to assist the affected population as much as possible by providing free access to health care, education and other social benefits for all residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia.

Mister President,

The continuously deteriorating human rights situation in these occupied regions of Georgia remains a cause of serious concern. We are deeply concerned by the impunity surrounding grave human rights violations committed in conflict-affected areas. Kidnappings, arbitrary detentions and arrests (some of them with lethal outcome), prolonged and unprecedented restrictions on freedom of movement, lack of access to health care and to education in their native language have a direct negative impact on the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of people affected by this protracted conflict. Process of "Borderisation" contributes to the further deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied regions of Georgia. In recent year, the situation has been further affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adoption of the resolution on the Cooperation with Georgia in the 46th session of the Human Rights Council clearly demonstrated that the international community remains

seized on the matter. The need to address grave violations of human rights and humanitarian issues faced by the persons forcefully displaced from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in Georgia was clearly expressed therein.

In this context, we remain concerned that in the past several years no international human rights monitoring mechanism has been granted unrestricted access to the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia. We therefore call for an immediate access for the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and other international and regional human rights mechanisms.

We reiterate our support to the process of Geneva International Discussions and join the UN Secretary-General's call to all relevant stakeholders to step up efforts to make a tangible progress on key security and humanitarian issues, to meet the pressing humanitarian concerns of the affected population, including IDPs. We remain concerned about continued refusal by Russia and participants from Tskhinvali and Sukhumi to engage on the topic of refugees and displaced persons in the Geneva International Discussions, although this topic is at the core of the mandate of the Geneva International Discussions.

To conclude, Mister President, given the lack of progress on the ground, we call for the UN's continuous engagement. As in previous years, we shall vote in favor of the resolution and call on all UN Member States to do the same.

I thank you.

New York, 16 June 2021