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Mr Arseniy YATSENYUK
Prime Minister of Ukraine

Strasbourg, 27 June 2014

Dear Prime Minister,

As a follow-up to my recent visit to Ukraine (Kyiv and Odesa), I would like to take this opportunity to raise with you several issues concerning the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), which include women, children, and persons with disabilities, many of whom have been traumatised by hostilities.

During my stay in Kyiv, I met with a number of persons displaced from Crimea and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. 72 such persons were accommodated in an auxiliary building in the Mezhyhirya estate, which I visited together with UNHCR. I also had an opportunity to discuss in detail the concerns and problems faced by displaced persons with regional and local authorities in Odesa, as well as representatives of the international community and non-governmental organisations working with IDPs.

I would like to draw your attention to the following challenges, which in my view require a coordinated response at the central level. Firstly, I believe there is an urgent need to establish a centralised registration system that would contain all the relevant information about displaced persons and their situation.

Secondly, the government should establish a centralised state entity (or at least should appoint a senior official in the government) in charge of overall co-ordination of the humanitarian response to the IDP situation. To date, the response to the humanitarian needs, including housing and food, has been made possible by a generous outpouring of solidarity by numerous individuals and non-governmental organisations. Such voluntary assistance can only be a short-term solution and as such is not sustainable.

Thirdly, I would like to encourage the Government of Ukraine to work in close co-operation with various international institutions, most notably the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in order to bring the legislative norms regulating the situation of IDPs and ensuring their protection in line with European and international standards. In this regard, it has been brought to my attention that the Law "On the legal status of persons who were forced to leave their place of residence as a result of the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and of the conditions connected with the conduct of the Anti-Terrorist Operation on the territory of Ukraine" - which was adopted by the Parliament on 19 June - has several gaps which should be addressed in order to ensure effective protection of the rights of IDPs as provided for in the relevant international legal instruments. In particular, the legislation should protect persons against discrimination on the grounds of their displacement, and should provide for a simplified procedure for residence registration, access to social services and unemployment benefits, protection of property rights, guarantees to protect family unity, as well as safeguarding IDPs' right to vote.

Finally, there is an acute need to develop a governmental strategy to provide durable solutions with regard to accommodation and opportunities for livelihood for those displaced persons who may not be in a position to return to their original place of residence in the months to come.

On my part, I intend to raise awareness among various international organisations and donors with regard to the situation of displaced persons in Ukraine and urge them to provide Ukraine with any assistance which would help to address their needs. At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities must take the lead in this process and demonstrate their resolve in ensuring that IDPs receive all the protection they are entitled to under international law, as well as durable housing and livelihood opportunities.

I look forward to receiving your reply and to continuing a constructive dialogue and co-operation with you and your government. I also hope I will have an opportunity to discuss these issues with you in more detail in the course of my next visit to Kyiv in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

Nils Muižnieks