**Every action counts: international conference to mark the World Refugee Day**

**June 20, 2020, Yerevan** - Today an online conference entitled “Every Action Counts: Efficient and Sustainable Protection of Refugee Rights in Armenia” was held to mark the World Refugee Day.

The conference launched with a video message by Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which was followed by a video message by the RA Minister of Foreign Affairs **Mr.** **Zohrab Mnatsakanyan**. The Minister depicted the mass flows of refugees to Armenia over the last three decades that were displaced in particular from Azerbaijan, Iraq and Syria, while highlighting the challenges in this area: “I would like to highlight two aspects. First is the international solidarity underpinned in the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the second one, which persists as the imperative of all times, the exclusion of politicization of humanitarian crises. Under no circumstance should the refugees and displaced persons be used as instruments of political gains,” said the Minister adding that the task of the international cooperation to efficiently serve the humanitarian goals, in particular those referring to refugees, should know no boundaries and be inclusive to the extent possible.

**Mr. Artak Apitonyan**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed the main theme and history of the event referring to Fridtjof Nansen as the Nation of League's first High Commissioner for Refugees and his humanitarian undertakings. “UNHCR called the process of integrating refugees and granting them citizenship undertaken by Armenia as “one of the most successful voluntary naturalizations of refugees in the world”. Needless to say, that the shameful practice of the instrumentalization of the refugees and using them as a tool for political pressure has been alien to us from the outset,” mentioned the Deputy Minister. He added that Despite its limited financial resources, like in the past, Armenia continues to be a host country for refugees, providing shelter to the people at various times affected by wars and internal turmoil, such as acceptance of refugees from Iraq and Syria.

The event was attended by members of the National Assembly, Government officials, representatives of non-governmental and international organizations, refugees from Armenia, USA and EU, who gathered together to once again voice refugee issues, develop new approaches to address those, and recommend solutions for facing the newly emerging challenges.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Armenia **Mr. Shombi Sharp** noted: "We work in partnership and coordination between the UN and the Government of Armenia. In the process of nationalization and realization of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), led by the ‘leaving no one behind’ principle, we should ensure that refugees and displaced populations are mainstreamed into the SDGs on an equal basis with locals.”

According to **Ms. Anna-Carin Öst**, UNHCR Representative in Armenia, the World Refugee Day celebrates the strength and resilience of the people who were forced to flee – the people who have found a safe haven and have the courage to start a new life in a new country they can call home. "Refugees bring with them a great diversity of skills, knowledge and experience. If given the chance, they can make tangible contributions to the development of their host country," she said, adding that UNHCR appeals to everyone to help continue the global action for solidarity, where everyone can make a difference and everyone counts when it comes to the promotion of inclusion, respect and dignity of all, including refugees, displaced and stateless persons.

**Mr. Armen Ghazaryan**, Head of the Migration Service, underlined the new challenges emerging daily. He emphasized the work aimed at improving the asylum system in Armenia. "Last year we launched the Program of Apartment Purchase Certificates. Together with international partners, we make every effort to support the integration of Syrian-Armenian refugees," he stated, accentuating the right to work, among other rights, of refugees almost equal to those enjoyed by the Armenian citizens, as the best practice of integration in Armenia.

**Mr. Arman Tatoyan**, the Human Rights Defender underlined the fact that refugees were more vulnerable in terms of human rights violations because of the linguistic, cultural and other differences. To that effect, he stressed that the level of the state's defense mechanisms should be higher.

Many of the participants welcomed the proposal made by **Mr. Tevan Poghosyan**, ICHD Chair, on establishing a common refugee platform. The scope of the collected issues will be further reviewed by the organizers as categories of sector-specific problems, challenges and best practices. Based on this, stand-alone agendas will be elaborated to make the collected issues a subject for discrete examination.

**The Conference was organized with the joint efforts of the Migration Service of Armenia, UNHCR Armenia and the International Center for Human Development think tank.**

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