

**Statement by H.E. Irakli Kobakhidze,
Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, at the General Debate on
“Strengthening the Global Regime for Migrants and Refugees:
The Need for Evidence-Based Policy Solutions**

Inter-Parliamentary Union

Geneva, March 2018

Dear Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

Excellences,

We are gathered to discuss one of the most important aspects of contemporary international politics and legal architecture of the world – migration and refugee issues. It is of paramount importance to achieve and maintain coordinated approach toward these issues at a global scale, because, ultimately, it is the humanitarian side of politics that determines the shape and essence of the condition and future of humanity as we know it.

Therefore, the Government of Georgia stands for better coordination at all levels to improve the degree of national coherence, quality of regional cooperation, and dynamics of global action in order to achieve more tangible goals in ameliorating the lives of hundreds of thousands, millions of migrants and refugees around the world.

I would like to explicate the national strategy of Georgia in this regard, as well as Georgia’s vision for a better management of the issues of migration and refugees.

It is all too well known for us what impact the flow of refugees and internally displaced persons can exert not only on national but also on regional stability and security. For over 25 years, Georgia has been tackling the overwhelming problem of accommodating over 280,000 internally displaced persons who fled the conflict-ravaged parts of Georgia – Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, or so-called South Ossetia. The first waves of Georgians and citizens of other

ethnicities were expelled *en masse* in result of ethnic cleansing after the Georgian Government lost control of these territories in the early 1990s. These territories were illegally and forcefully occupied by the Russian Federation after the military aggression against sovereign Georgia in August 2008, increasing the numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, and, at the same time, further aggravating the humanitarian and human rights situation inside the occupied territories.

Currently, Russia occupies up to 20 per cent of Georgia's territory; illegally stations armed forces in the occupied territories; maintains the occupational regimes in both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region; and through these occupational regimes commits numerous grave violations of human rights – such as abduction and torture of peaceful citizens (most recently that of Mr. Archil Tatumashvili who was murdered with torture in detention in the town of Tskhinvali), restriction of freedom of movement of local population and internally displaced persons from these regions, and deprivation of children to study in their native Georgian language.

Moreover, Russian armed forces pursue the policy of so-called borderization, installing barbed wire fences that not only restrict the freedom of movement but also cause distressing and illegitimate separation of communities and, in some instances, even families. In other words, both IDPs and the population that stayed in the occupied territories face serious challenges for survival and basic welfare. This situation creates insurmountable impediments for the return of IDPs and refugees to their homes, posing an imminent threat of the new wave of forced displacement.

All this is happening despite numerous resolutions of the UN General Assembly, reaffirming the right of IDPs and refugees to return to home in safety and with dignity, reconfirming their property rights and unacceptability of forced demographic changes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Year 2018 marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Guiding Principles on internal displacement. This fact should serve as yet another wake-up call for all states to take the scale and complexity of the problem as a shared responsibility. Georgia, certainly, does so.

Acknowledgement of universal standards of human rights, and also numerous grave problems led the Georgian authorities toward the creation of effective mechanisms for dealing with the acute and urgent issues associated with IDPs and refugees but also with international migrants.

The role of the Parliament has been and remains crucial in the process. Through legislative process, Georgian Parliament created a body of laws that establishes clear guidance for the executive for exercising adequate standards for protection of human rights, social safety and healthcare of migrants and refugees. In particular, in December 2016, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the law on International Protection, which, in accordance to Geneva Convention and EU legislation, regulates all the important aspects of entry, stay, and standards of treatment for aliens and stateless persons.

According to this Law and subsequent by-laws, the authority responsible for the asylum procedure is the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia. Despite daunting presence of hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees, Georgia admits thousands of international migrants (1,449 asylum seekers in 2015, 947 in 2016, and 951 in 2017). Nowadays there are 1,477 international protection holders in Georgia, among them 450 are refugees and 1,027 are humanitarian status holders.

Thus, after two decades when Georgia was mostly a country of origin for international migration, now Georgia is also a destination country. We understand and acknowledge the challenges faced by both groups of states. As a consequence of, and response to this awareness, Georgia has taken a number of important steps to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Fulfillment of institutional, normative, and practical guidelines by Georgia received high assessment from the European Union, facilitating the visa-free travel regime between Georgia and the EU.

For coordinating the national policies relating with migration and refugees at all levels – national, regional, and global, the Georgian Government created a modern, strong, comprehensive, flexible and effective mechanism capable to run the simultaneous, interlinked and co-ordinated action of all relevant actors. This is a commission-type agency entrusted to be the main body responsible for the elaboration, planning, co-ordination and implementation of migration policy. Thus, the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI) coordinates

between 12 agencies and is well-equipped to deal and help with the contemporary challenges of global and national scale.

These measures correspond to the broad conclusions reached through discussions by IPU in the past few years, namely, that migrants and refugees are entitled to the same human rights as all other people, requiring governments to observe due process and take measures to uphold those rights.

In conclusion, Georgia is committed to internationally co-ordinated efforts to bring the discussion but also common action with respect to ameliorating problems of international migration and refugees and, despite its own heavy burden of IDPs makes valuable contribution to these discussions and efforts.

Georgia will continue to be an active partner of international community in improving the humanitarian situation of migrants and refugees worldwide.

Thank you.