

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched one year ago, from this same tribune, with a pledge that “no one will be left behind”.

With this statement the UN Member States committed to address the consequences of a migrant crisis which was already leaving millions stranded. Yet forced displacement has since then only increased, with a staggering 300 million international migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons registered this year.

Against this backdrop conflicts and insecurity in parts of Africa and the Middle East continue to drive mass exodus, and the death toll of migrants crossing borders continues to climb.

Millions globally are still at risk of being left behind.

Excellencies,

The burden of forced displacement has not bypassed Georgia.

Since the early 90s, Georgia’s regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia have witnessed several waves of ethnic cleansing under occupation by the Russian Federation. Approximately 400 000 persons have been forcibly displaced – when Georgia’s entire population makes up only 4 million. Prospects of their safe return are grim with ongoing creeping annexation and installation of barbed wire fences along the occupation line. Meanwhile ethnic Georgians in the occupied territories continue to suffer from daily discrimination.

It is simply not possible to turn a blind eye to this, and to what is going on worldwide.

In this struggle Georgia is committed to pulling its weight.

We have already received more than 4 000 asylum seekers from various parts of the world (*Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Egypt, and Somalia*). Georgian Universities offer educational programmes for students from displaced communities. We are committed

to continuing our assistance in the educational sphere, together with interested partners, including donor countries or organisations that can provide financial support to this initiative.

The International Organisation for Migration, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other international agencies have made immense efforts to alleviate the plight of victims. But the gravity of the situation requires a coordinated political response – the situation now is unprecedented. We need to address the root causes of forced displacement to ensure the situation does not get out of control. We need to be proactive rather than reactive, prevent escalation of conflicts, preclude further waves of displacement.

The question is: where do we start?

Violation of international law is one of the root causes of conflicts. If we can ensure all actors abide by the law and strictly observe their commitments, we can start to move towards a more peaceful world. We can start to prevent crises and the mass exodus that ensues from the millions affected.

At the Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit this May we committed to promote a new approach and support the emergence of safe, dignified, and durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons. The right to safe return is a basic human right and it must be guaranteed, irrespective of political differences.

Let me reiterate in closing that Georgia will continue to contribute to international efforts in addressing large movements of migrants and refugees – regardless of our small size or our own security challenges.

I thank you.