

**STATEMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR
REFUGEES**

Georgian-Abkhaz Talks 17-19 November, 1997
Geneva

A Balanced Approach

Assistance to Returnees Already in Places of Origin

Security in Places of Origin

**Continued Support by the Political Leadership for the Process of Return and
Reconciliation**

The High Commissioner for Refugees is delighted with the statements which have been issued as a result of the meeting between President Eduard Shevardnadze and Mr. Lyudwig Chibirov, the South Ossetian leader in connection with the successful outcome of the JCC process in regard to the Georgian-Osset conflict. The fact that voluntary repatriation from the Russian Federation has begun is a good example of an incremental step by step - approach towards confidence building. The further fact that both leaders have declared that 1998 will be a year of refugee return is a further positive step which will assist in the creation conditions for the return of peoples that have been displaced as a result of conflict. The High Commissioner for Refugees has pledged her support to the sides, the OSCE, the Russian Facilitator as well as to the returnees whose individual and voluntary decision to return is an act of reconciliation and appeals to the international community for funds in order to provide rehabilitation assistance to the return movement in support of the reconciliation process.

In regard to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict resolution process, the High Commissioner for Refugees expresses her support to the two leaders, the President of Georgia Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze and the Abkhaz leader Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba for the support they have given to the establishment of a positive political framework, to the two sides for their continued bi-lateral negotiations, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota whose strenuous efforts and his wisdom in chairing the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict resolution process has led to a new vitality in the process; the Russian Federation as facilitator and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General for their support to the process. Above all the High Commissioner for Refugees expresses her support for those individuals who have spontaneously decided to return through their own means to Abkhazia and pledges her continued support. UNHCR will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those returnees and other victims of war who are already in their areas of origin and have decided to rehabilitate their lives and those of their families. Such assistance will be maintained in a balanced non-political and humanitarian manner in order to ensure that all victims of war and returnees have equal access to international humanitarian assistance.

The High Commissioner for refugees would like to remind the conference, however, that suggestions concerning the phased and organized returns of displaced people should be made with caution as the conditions of security and safety must first be guaranteed before the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees can use her good office to facilitate, organize or promote an organized or phased return movement. In order to create security conditions the High Commissioner for refugees would welcome creative and innovative mechanisms that are mutually acceptable to the two sides in order that a humanitarian space could be created so that UNHCR, the UN Development agencies as well as implementing partners could work for the benefit of the victims of conflict as well as the returnees.

Above all, the High Commissioner for Refugees appeals for the leadership of the two sides to create a climate in support of a space in which individuals can rehabilitate their lives from the ashes of conflict that has destroyed what took decades of planning to create. Leadership will also be needed in order to assure the international donor community that their voluntary contributions towards the UN and other agencies humanitarian and development work in the conflict zones are well deserved and are in support of a reconciliation process benefiting those who are victims of the conflict.