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PRESS RELEASE

Mikhail Kamynin, the Spokesman of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Answers Media Questions Regarding UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres' Upcoming Visit to Russia

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Question: Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is arriving in the Russian Federation on April 5 for a visit. What is the aim of this visit? With whom does Guterres intend to meet?

Answer: Antonio Guterres is going to meet in Moscow with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, Minister of the Russian Federation for Civil Defense, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters Sergey Shoigu, the chairmen of a number of State Duma committees, Director of the Federal Migration Service Konstantin Romodanovsky, Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation Vladimir Lukin, and Ella Pamfilova, Chair of the Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights. On April 8-11, Guterres is planning to make a trip to St. Petersburg and the North Caucasus.

He is expected to discuss in the course of his talks with the Russian officials some topical issues of cooperation by Russia with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including aid to internally displaced persons in the North Caucasus, UNHCR assistance to improving the institution of asylum in Russia, and the overcoming of the problem of statelessness, more specifically in Latvia and Estonia. The presentation of an aid for parliamentarians on statelessness will take place in the State Duma.

Question: How have Russian relations with the UNHCR been built in recent years?

Answer: After ratification of the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees in 1992, Russia became a member of the UNHCR Executive Committee. Fruitful cooperation has been arranged with the Office to create a system of international refugee protection both in our country and in the post-Soviet space as a whole. The UNHCR has participated in the formation of the legislative, institutional and operational basis for regulating the migration processes in Russia and other CIS countries.

At this stage, one priority thrust of our cooperation with the UNHCR is the work to

overcome statelessness, especially in Latvia and Estonia where 418.5 and 135 thousand people respectively are "noncitizens," that is stateless persons; to develop the migration dialogue in the CIS region and to assist politically and financially the overcoming of the most acute humanitarian crises involving migration.

Twice, in 2003 and 2005, our country made a voluntary contribution to the Office's budget amounting to 2 million US dollars. In the future we intend to make such contributions annually.

Question: What does assistance to Russia from the UNHCR consist of?

Answer: In the first place, about half the budget of the UNHCR Representation in Russia, that is about 5 million US dollars, goes on the support of internally displaced persons in the North Caucasus region. There function two UNHCR offices there, and the UNHCR Representative in Russia, Kasidis Rochanakorn, is simultaneously the UN humanitarian coordinator in our country.

In addition, the UNHCR is rendering assistance in various forms to foreigners seeking asylum in Russia and to recognized refugees. We consider fairly successful the existing "division of labor" in this field between the UNHCR Representation and the Federal Migration Service, to which international specialists also provide valuable expert assistance.

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