Mr. Chairman,

I thank the High Commissioner for his presentation and for the submitted Report. Montenegro fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the European Union on this agenda item. I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity that are of particular significance to my country.

Mr. Chairman,

We are being constantly reminded of the scope and seriousness of the pressing issue of refugees and internally displaced people around the world. Violence and conflict-related conditions in DRC, Syria, Sudan/South Sudan, Central African Republic has contributed to new displacements, thus worsening the plight for millions of affected people whose basic human rights and elementary existence are severely endangered. We commend the work and role of UNHCR whose mitigating actions and relief, even with limited resources, to those in need are irreplaceable and make real difference. It is however obvious that more has to be done in order to make sure that the needs of refugees, as well as of IDPs, particularly for the most vulnerable groups like women and children, are addressed in a more comprehensive manner that will guarantee their protection and provide for durable solution of their situation. In this context, renewed joint efforts and coherent approach, including solidarity and burden sharing, and strong sense of partnerships across all levels, is required if we want to bring about tangible and sustainable results. Montenegro is firmly devoted to this objective and reconfirms its commitment to the highest principles of international protection, support and assistance to refugees and displaced persons.
Mr. Chairman,

In the past twenty years, Montenegro was faced with the arrival and inflow of refugees and displaced persons from the region of former Yugoslavia. So the Government of Montenegro had to embark on active and responsible policy with a view to effectively tackle and secure a durable solution to this challenge. To this aim, Montenegro has developed solid legislative framework and adopted a number of strategic documents that seek to address the status of refugees and displaced persons. The Strategy for Durable Solution of Issues Regarding Displaced and Internally Displaced Persons, as a key guiding document, identified two principles that would form the basis for our approach, namely integration into Montenegrin society and voluntary return into the country of origin.

The activities of the Government are also focused on intensifying of bilateral cooperation with countries of origin and direct communication with displaced and internally displaced persons in the field, through informative campaigns and organized visits to the countries of origin, all in order to obtain identity documents necessary for regulation of their status. In cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and with the help of international partners, Montenegro is implementing the Regional Housing Programme, which envisages durable solution of housing issues for displaced and internally displaced persons from the former Yugoslavia. We are firmly committed to permanently end the existence of collective centers, and actual results shall be evident next year when the construction of residential units will start in Konik, the largest refugee camp in Montenegro.

We are also conducting a number of activities to improve the socio-economic status of refugees and displaced persons, with special emphasis on the education of children of internally displaced persons from Roma and Egyptian population.

Displaced and internally displaced persons, according to the Law on Foreigners, have the possibility to regulate their legal status in Montenegro (the status of foreigners with permanent residence and the status of foreigners with temporary residence). With the large number of people that fled to Montenegro in the past who found shelter and home and are still residing in my country, voluntary return did not show as the option they would exercise on a wide scale. Taking into account the socio-economic burden and challenge this poses, we are constantly working on awareness raising and on possibilities of discharging the rights to voluntary return of displaced and internally displaced persons to their countries of origin. However, we must stress the need for mutual cooperation and more active collaboration with the countries of origin in order to create the conditions for safe return of those who would want that.

Montenegro is also pursuing an active policy on asylum and migration. In this vein, we expect the opening of the Center for accommodation of asylum seekers by the end of this year, which will, in compliance of Montenegrin legislation with the principles of the
EU, create necessary conditions for the full application of international standards in this area.

As a representative of a country which has faced the issue of refugees and displaced people more than once in the past two decades, I would like to draw the attention to the necessity for a more effective mechanism of coordination of UN agencies and recipient countries that would focus on the assistance to refugees but also on the needs of host countries.

Mr. Chairman,

Throughout history Montenegro has gathered rich heritage that forms the core of our society. In safeguarding this treasure, we remain dedicated to the successful implementation of all national and international initiatives and instruments, including the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention. Allow me to inform that Montenegro is in the final phase of preparations to join the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. My country will continue to improve the situation of refugees in order to ensure equal rights and opportunities for every member of our society.

Let me conclude by expressing our support for the Finnish draft resolution on the “Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees”, which Montenegro traditionally co-sponsors. We fully endorse and are grateful to the UNHCR for the support they are providing to refugees and displaced persons in Montenegro and around the globe.

Thank you.