

The Campaign to End Statelessness

May 2015 Update



#IBELONG

Join us in our campaign to end statelessness



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Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 10 March 2015, UNHCR in partnership with UN Women and OHCHR held a **High-Level Side Event at this year's Commission on the Status of Women**, which commemorated Beijing+20: twenty years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, under which States committed to eliminate gender discrimination from all their laws. Gender discrimination in nationality laws remains a major cause of statelessness in almost all regions of the world. The United States Assistant Secretary of State moderated the event and ministers from Indonesia and Algeria gave inspirational speeches on how their countries had achieved gender parity in their nationality laws. Representatives from Australia and Portugal called on States to live up to their international commitments and signalled their support for the elimination of such discrimination from nationality laws globally. The Minister from The Bahamas made reference to her country's pending referendum on citizenship and noted the Government's commitment to a public education campaign to explain the benefits of reform. UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, [Volker Türk](#), highlighted the #IBELONG Campaign as an important initiative for linking local and international

activism on this issue. States with problematic nationality laws will have an opportunity to pledge to make reforms at a special event in New York in September 2015.

A new study on '[The Right to a Nationality in Africa](#)' was launched on 29 January 2015 at an event jointly organized by the African Union Commission, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and UNHCR, as part of the 24th African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Keynote speakers included President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Alassane Ouattara, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Mrs. Zainabo Sylvie Kayitesi and Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons for the African Commission, Mrs. Maya Sahlí Fadel and High Commissioner António Guterres. The speeches underscored the need for reforms of nationality laws and documentation procedures throughout the continent, the importance of resolving large-scale situations of statelessness which can fuel displacement and instability, and the urgent need for a Protocol on the Right to a Nationality in Africa.



Côte d'Ivoire, February 2015 / Mr. Coulibaly G. Mamadou, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, signs the Abidjan Declaration in the presence of Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Dr. Fatimata Dia Sow, ECOWAS Commissioner in charge of Social Affairs. © UNCHR / Hien Macline

From 23 – 25 February 2015, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UNHCR, organised the first-ever [Conference on Statelessness in West Africa](#), hosted by the Government of Côte D'Ivoire. Côte D'Ivoire's President and Minister of Justice, and representatives of other ECOWAS States strongly endorsed UNHCR's #IBELONG Campaign. They also urged the adoption of a Protocol on the Right to a Nationality in Africa. The key outcome of the conference is the [Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness](#) under which States also expressly approved the [Conclusion and Recommendations of the Ministerial](#)

[Conference on Statelessness in the ECOWAS Region](#), a document which includes 62 recommendations on prevention and reduction of statelessness, partnership and information-sharing, identification and protection of stateless persons. **Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Togo** also used the event to deliver commitments to address statelessness in their respective territories.

On 12 February 2015, UNHCR and the Department of International Law of the Organisation of American States (OAS) Secretariat for Legal Affairs organized its [Second Course on the Fundamental Elements for Identification and Protection of Stateless Persons and Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness in the Americas](#) for officials of Permanent Missions, academia, and civil society organizations in

Washington DC. The workshop focused on identification and protection of stateless persons and prevention and reduction of statelessness in the Americas. On 22 April, High Commissioner António Guterres, [delivered the 57th Lecture of the Americas at the OAS](#), in which he congratulated countries in Latin America and the Caribbean for recently adopting the [Brazil Declaration and Platform for Action](#), which commits these States to eradicating statelessness by 2024 in line with the timeframe of the #IBELONG Campaign.

Media impact of the Campaign

We have **two new photo essays**, one telling the [stories of stateless people around the world](#) and the other on [statelessness in Estonia and Latvia](#). You can also watch and share [Ali's Story](#) – a documentary on the life of one stateless man living in Côte D'Ivoire, as well as a sweet little animation, "[Why don't these 10 million people belong?](#)", put together by UNHCR's office in Rome, which shows what it's like to be excluded, because you're stateless.

Brazil's national launch of the #IBELONG Campaign on 22 April 2015 saw 1000 new signatures added to the Open Letter in the space of just a few days. A [new video](#) from Georgia showing the impact of statelessness was broadcast on national and regional TV networks and on social media following the **Georgian launch** of the #IBELONG Campaign on 28 April 2015.

As this is a ten-year global initiative, we must do everything we can to continue increasing visibility of #IBELONG Campaign and promoting the necessary advocacy and action to end statelessness. Partners are encouraged to disseminate the [Special Report](#) and the [Global Action Plan to End Statelessness](#). If you have not done so, we strongly encourage you to sign the [Open Letter to End Statelessness](#). While we have already garnered considerable public support for the Campaign – we're up to 7000 signatures - we hope that more organisations concerned about statelessness will sign and disseminate the Open Letter.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

We have recently published **three good practices papers** which aim to help governments, civil society, UNHCR and other international organisations implement the 10 Actions of the [Global Action Plan to End Statelessness](#). The first paper shows how countries as diverse as **Brazil, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam** have taken steps to [Resolve Existing Major Situations of Statelessness](#), to help achieve the goals of Action 1 of the Global Action Plan. The second paper focuses on [Action 3: Removing Gender Discrimination from Nationality Laws](#), and highlights success stories from **Algeria, Morocco and Senegal**, as well as the exemplary efforts of a network of women's rights civil society groups in the Middle East and North Africa, towards achieving gender equality in nationality laws. The third paper examines what it takes for States to [accede to the two statelessness conventions](#), which is the aim of Action 9. Examples from **Croatia, The Philippines and a number of States in West Africa** are used as illustrations. More good practices papers are soon to be published, corresponding to each of the remaining Actions.

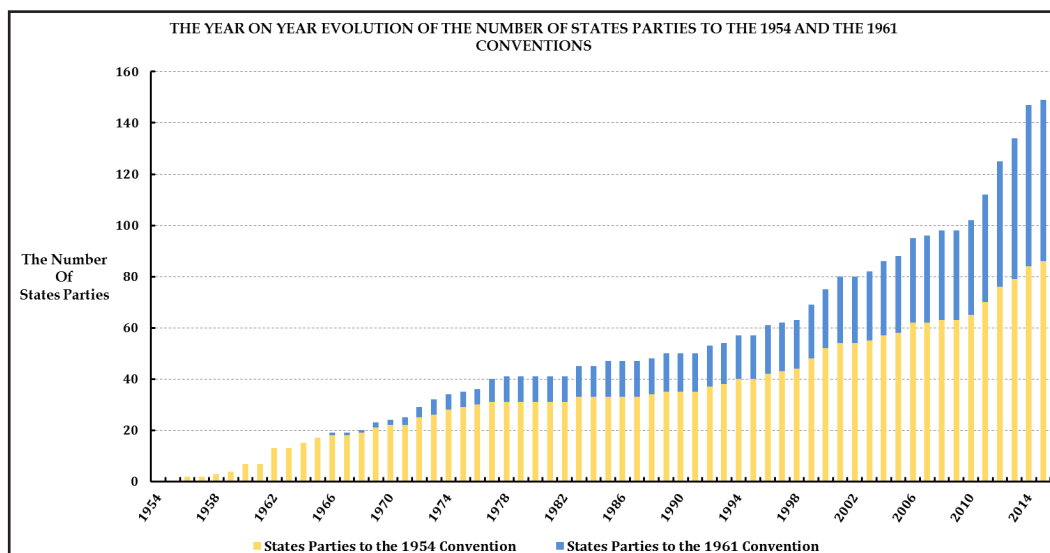
UNHCR recommends the development of National Action Plans as one of the key ways that States can implement the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness. **Iceland** is on its way to becoming the first country in Europe to adopt a National Action Plan. In February 2015, UNHCR met with representatives from the Directorate of Immigration and the Ministry of Justice to discuss concrete actions to address statelessness in Iceland. The **Icelandic National Action Plan** will address the various concerns in the area of the identification and protection of stateless persons, prevention of statelessness, data collection, as well as the accession to the two statelessness conventions.

The pace of progress continues to accelerate with respect to Action 9 of the Global Action Plan, which calls on States to accede to the statelessness conventions. The tally of States party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons has reached [a new high of 86](#) with recent accessions by **El Salvador and Turkey** in February and March 2015 respectively. Turkey will now be able to quickly implement the 1954

Convention as it already established a statelessness determination procedure in 2014. We are aiming for a target of 90 States in the near future with **Burundi, Guinea Bissau and Mali** all taking steps at the domestic level to secure accession to this treaty. More accessions to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness are also imminent with Guinea Bissau poised to deposit its instrument of accession and Turkey's draft law on accession already on the Parliament's agenda.

A [landmark decision by the Hungarian Constitutional Court](#) on 23 February 2015 has improved implementation of Action 6 of the Global Action Plan which promotes the establishment of statelessness determination procedures to protect stateless migrants and to facilitate their naturalisation. Before this judgement, only lawfully staying persons could initiate a statelessness determination procedure in Hungary. Both UNHCR and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee officially intervened in the case, which culminated eight years of advocacy on this issue. The judgement noted that "*While the [UNHCR] Guidelines belong to the so-called non-binding international instruments, it is nevertheless indisputable that the UNHCR is the most authentic entity to interpret international legal questions and practice related to the Statelessness Convention*" to justify its conclusion that the requirement in Hungarian law, under which only lawfully staying persons could apply for stateless status was a breach of international law. Another boost to Action 6 occurred on 23 April 2015, when the Ministry of Internal Affairs of **Kosovo** adopted an [Administrative Instruction](#) which establishes a statelessness determination procedure and grants a protection status to stateless individuals.

Mali has taken steps to implement Action 7 of the Global Action Plan which aims at ensuring birth registration to prevent statelessness. The Government has launched a process that will allow almost 8000 stateless Mauritanian refugee children born in Mali to receive birth certificates, which is a requirement for naturalisation in Mali. Birth certificates also facilitate access to state services, particularly education.



Upcoming Events

We're kicking off the first of our series of **Good Practices Workshops** on 7 – 8 May 2015 relating to Action 6 of the Global Action Plan (“Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization”). Currently, only a small number of States have statelessness determination mechanisms which lead to stateless individuals being granted a legal status that permits residence and guarantees enjoyment of basic human rights. This meeting will provide a forum for exchange of information and technical advice and the sharing of good practices between States and other actors. Participants will include government representatives, legal practitioners and UNHCR staff from around 20 countries.

For the third year running, the **UNHCR Award for Statelessness Research** has opened up for nominations from academic institutions who are invited to nominate research by undergraduate, graduate and doctoral researchers in the field of statelessness. The most accomplished works will be judged on various criteria, including contribution to increasing understanding of the nature and scope of the problem of statelessness, identifying stateless populations and understanding the reasons which have led to statelessness. An International Expert Jury composed of leading academics and practitioners working on statelessness will be tasked with the selection and three awards from a total prize pool of USD 4,000 will be granted to the best research papers in each category. The deadline for **nominations** is 1 June 2015.

For the 5th year in a row NGOs will have the opportunity to discuss the issue of statelessness at the **Annual NGO Consultations** in July. The theme of this year's consultations is “Solutions”, which is integral to the #IBELONG Campaign. The goals of this Campaign can only be achieved with the full engagement of a strong network of stakeholders, including civil society actors. Examples of initiatives being taken by NGOs around the world to implement the Global Action Plan will be the focus of the discussion. If your NGO would like to participate, [register here](#) before 22 May 2015. User name: NGOs and Password: Conference.

The Statelessness Section is looking forward to hosting the **4th Annual Global Statelessness Retreat for NGOs** immediately following the Annual NGO Consultations. About 30 NGOs from around the world will come together in a country house in Lausanne to discuss how civil society can successfully help to implement the Global Action Plan.

Campaign Resources

Want to support the Campaign? Take a look at our [Digital Toolkit](#) and post a digital banner on your website, mobilize your social media contacts by sharing one of our posts, download and post our Twitter cards or embed a short video that explains statelessness. Videos, photo essays and web stories can be found on our [ibelong stories page](#). Legal resources are available on [Refworld](#).

Learn More About Statelessness

Learning about statelessness is fun and easy. Take advantage of our [statelessness e-learning course](#) and [self-study module](#) from the comfort of your armchair!