

The Campaign to End Statelessness

April 2016 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



In cooperation with
UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.

Welcome to the second year of the #IBelong Campaign! We'll continue to share Campaign news and developments in 2016 on a quarterly basis.

Mobilizing governments and civil society

In a [report](#) on the **impact of the arbitrary deprivation of nationality on the enjoyment of the rights of children** presented at the 31st session of the Human Rights Council (29 February - 24 March 2016), the UN Secretary General encouraged States to “fully cooperate with such international initiatives as the UNHCR Global Campaign to End Statelessness.” The report also urged States to include safeguards in their nationality laws to prevent childhood statelessness; honour international obligations to register every child at birth; and accede to the UN statelessness conventions.

On **International Women's Day** (March 8), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, used his [speech to the Plenary of the European Parliament](#) to highlight the issue of gender discrimination in the nationality laws of 27 countries - a major cause of statelessness globally. UNHCR also issued an updated [Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2016](#), which provides substantial information on the topic.

In February 2016, delegations from 19 Permanent Missions to the United Nations in Geneva came together for the second meeting of the “**Friends of the Campaign to End Statelessness**” hosted by the Australian Permanent Mission in Geneva. Key points of discussion included how to tackle statelessness as a cross-cutting human rights, humanitarian and development issue.

At the regional level, in Southern Africa the **Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa** served as a platform to promote good practice examples to prevent statelessness and protect stateless individuals. A **Memorandum of Understanding between the Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and UNHCR** concluded in January 2016 will further boost action in the region. Activities will include gathering data on statelessness and awareness raising to increase birth registration of migrant workers' children in communities at risk of statelessness.



Participants at the Regional Workshop and Consultation on Promoting the Right to Nationality for Women and Children in ASEAN Member States in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

In the Americas, a [report](#) by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on the ‘**Situation of Human Rights in the Dominican Republic**’ made recommendations to the Government of the Dominican Republic concerning the statelessness situation there. The report’s nine recommendations include the nullification of any norm that denies Dominican nationality to persons born in the territory of the Dominican Republic to foreign parents with irregular status; birth registration in order to ensure that all persons born on its soil are registered immediately after birth, irrespective of their descent or origin or the migratory situation of their parents; and accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions.

In Asia, in January 2016, delegates from the governments of almost all member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) attended a **Regional Workshop and Consultation on Promoting the Right to a Nationality for Women and Children in ASEAN Member States**. The workshop was co-hosted by UNHCR, Viet Nam’s Representatives to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and Viet Nam’s Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, and focused on progress in addressing statelessness at the sub-regional level. Also in January, UNHCR and the University of Melbourne’s Schools of Law and Government co-hosted the first **Workshop on Researching Statelessness in Asia and the Pacific**. The event resulted in a number of [recommendations](#), including: developing a prioritized and multidisciplinary regional research agenda; examining the possibility of establishing a research and teaching centre on statelessness in Asia and the Pacific; and establishing a web-based repository of data and information for

the region. In March 2016, preventing and reducing statelessness was promoted through a [Ministerial Declaration](#) adopted at the **6th Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime**.

In Europe, in March 2016, the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** adopted [Resolution 2099 \(2016\) on ‘The need to eradicate statelessness of children’](#). The Resolution sets out a number of steps to be taken by the Member States of the Council of Europe to eradicate childhood statelessness, including accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions; the introduction or improvement of existing statelessness determination procedures in line with UNHCR’s guidelines; and support to the [Global Action Plan to End Statelessness](#).

In the Middle East and North Africa, in February 2016, a **Regional Workshop on Realizing Women’s Nationality Rights** was organized by the [Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights](#) in Bahrain with UNHCR’s support. The event featured a constructive dialogue with key government counterparts, experts, and civil society groups about possible legislative reform to permit women to confer nationality to their children on an equal basis as men. Civil society experts from other countries in the region contributed to the dialogue. From 7-11 February, UNHCR, along with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law and the American University of Sharjah, hosted the **83rd session on International Refugee Law in the United Arab Emirates**. Participants from NGOs and UNHCR carried out training sessions on statelessness focusing on **good practices related to the removal of gender-discrimination from nationality laws**.

West Africa celebrates the first anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration



Senegalese musician Cheikh Lô performing for the first anniversary celebrations of the Abidjan Declaration in Dakar, Senegal.

On 25 February, **11 countries in West Africa commemorated the one-year anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration on the Eradication of Statelessness**. Special events were organised by Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone including radio broadcasts and the screening of statelessness videos on national television networks. In Senegal, members of a **high-level panel** comprising Government and UN representatives, as well as civil society organizations, took the opportunity to reiterate their commitment to end statelessness. [Artist Cheikh Lô and musical group Bideew Bou Bess joined UNHCR in the fight against statelessness](#) and the

band performed **the world's first statelessness song, "I Belong."** In Côte d'Ivoire, the Minister of Justice and the UNHCR's Representative published a **joint editorial** highlighting the government's commitment to reforming its nationality laws with support from UNHCR.

Progress achieved in West Africa since the adoption of the Abidjan Declaration includes:

- An estimated 22,000 people have **acquired identity documentation** to prove their nationality, eliminating their risk of statelessness.
- Benin, the Gambia, Mali, Senegal, Liberia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have developed **national action plans** to eradicate statelessness.
- 14 countries (all ECOWAS Member States apart from Cape Verde) have officially **nominated government focal points** on statelessness issues in order to strengthen the coordination of governmental actions in the fight against statelessness.
- Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo are currently **revising relevant laws** to bring them in line with international standards on statelessness.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with **Action 1 of the Global Action Plan (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness)**, the Philippines and Indonesia have worked with UNHCR to register more than 8,745 persons of Indonesian descent in seven provinces and two cities in the Philippines. In March, **664 persons of Indonesian descent** at risk of statelessness had their [Indonesian or Filipino citizenship confirmed at an event in the Philippines](#).

By the end of January, [Malaysian NGO Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas, completed a project registering stateless persons](#) in the states of Kedah, Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan in West Malaysia. Since 2014, 11,689 stateless persons have been registered, 6,407 have been provided with paralegal assistance, and 545 have acquired nationality documentation confirming their Malaysian citizenship.

In March, the [Royal Thai Government took new steps to address childhood statelessness](#) by requesting all districts to **identify and issue legal status to eligible stateless students in Thailand** recorded in the Government's database. This directive should benefit up to 65,000 students, or about 15% of the 443,862 people who were registered as stateless in Thailand at the end of October 2015.

In relation to **Action 2 (Ensure that no child is born stateless)**, **1,730 birth certificates** were recently distributed in **Benin** to populations at risk of statelessness in the disputed area of Kourou Koualou. In Mali, more than **7,800 late birth certificates** were distributed last year to children of Mauritanian parents born in the western region of Kayes.

In a high profile decision, the **Supreme Court of the Philippines determined in March that foundlings be considered natural born citizens**. The Court concluded that “in sum, all of the international laws and conventions and instruments on the matter of nationality of foundlings were designed to address the plight of a defenseless class which suffers from a misfortune not of their own making.”

With respect to **Action 3 (Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws)**, advocacy and awareness raising activities are underway in **Madagascar**, where a draft bill, if passed, will remove gender discrimination from the nationality law. Focus Development Madagascar, UNHCR’s implementing partner on statelessness in the country, is also working to resolve the existing major situation of statelessness of the Karana minority, consistent with **Action 1**. In March, the **Bahamian Parliament passed four constitutional bills** to remove gender-discriminatory provisions from its nationality laws. The bills will be put to a national [referendum on 7 June 2016](#).

On **Action 6 (Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate naturalization)**, a [breakthrough decision](#) of the civil court in Rome facilitates the acquisition of citizenship by stateless Roma born in Italy. In Bolivia, on 23 March, the Ministry of Government adopted **Ministerial Resolution No. 50/2016**, which **facilitates the naturalization of refugees and stateless persons**. The Resolution removes the requirement of a minimum period of residence and significantly reduces fees.

Campaign Publicity

In January, UNHCR and the Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) organized a public **lecture on Statelessness as a Global Human Rights Issue** in Mumbai, India that was attended by more than 150 people including academics, NGOs, students and human rights activists.

An audience of some 30,000 people was present for the screening of statelessness-themed films during the **film festival Afrikabok** that took place from February to March 2016 in Senegal.

On 7 March, the #IBelong Campaign was the focus of a **flash mob event in the Accra Mall**, Ghana’s most popular shopping centre. Around 250 people signed up to support the Campaign, including Ghanaian actor John Dumelo.



© Ahvia J. Campbell

Bahamian Prime Minister Perry Christie and members of his Cabinet walk to the House of Assembly to vote on the constitutional amendment bills.

On 24 February a [Summit on Statelessness in Canada](#) brought together legal, policy and governmental experts to discuss areas for improvement in Canada’s approach to statelessness. The event highlighted [two reports](#) on the protection of statelessness persons in the Canadian context, both commissioned by UNHCR.

With respect to **Action 7 (Ensure birth registration for prevention of statelessness)**, the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process launched a project this January to develop a [toolkit](#) that will help interested States to improve how they register births, deaths and marriages of asylum-seekers, refugees, persons of undetermined nationality, and stateless persons on their territory.



©FLASHMOB GHANA/B.Frimpong

Flash mob in action, Accra Mall, Ghana.

On 4 April, in Washington, DC, the Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness (Red ANA) and [a local bookstore](#) hosted a **presentation and book signing by Greg Constantine**, an acclaimed photographer known for his book 'Nowhere People' featuring photographs of stateless people. The event was accompanied by a discussion about statelessness in the Americas.

More **high level supporters** have joined the #IBelong Campaign by signing the **Open Letter** including: Radhika Coomaraswamy, former UN Under-Secretary-General; Abdulrahman Bello Dambazau, Nigerian Minister of Interior; Jayantha Dhanapala, President of the Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs; Maria Do Ceu Silva Monteiro, President of the ECOWAS Court of Justice; and Chandrika Kumaratunga, former President of Sri Lanka.

Upcoming Events

[UNHCR's Annual NGO Consultations](#) will take place from 15 -17 June in Geneva. The theme of this year's consultations is 'Youth' and participants will have the opportunity to discuss the findings of UNHCR's recent report '[I am Here, I Belong – The Urgent Need to End Childhood Statelessness](#)', listen to the experiences of stateless youth, and debate during a Food for Thought session on issues related to the impact of childhood statelessness. NGOs wishing to attend should register using the [online registration form](#) by 10 May 2016.

From 11-13 July the European Network on Statelessness (ENS) is organizing a three-day event at Maastricht University Campus in Brussels to engage young people motivated to help end childhood statelessness. In addition to this project, ENS is running a region-wide campaign called **#StatelessKids** to promote childhood nationality rights. The [upcoming youth congress](#) will be an opportunity for a group of 35 selected delegates (aged 18 to 28) to participate in trainings and become Youth Ambassadors promoting the #StatelessKids campaign across Europe.

Campaign Resources

Want to support the Campaign? Take a look at our [#IBelong website](#) 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!



In cooperation with

UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.

unhcr.org/ibelong