

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
17 – 19 JUNE 2014 - International Conference Center Geneva**

THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

Campaigning to end statelessness

Thursday 19 June 2014, 09h00 – 10h45 - Room 2

Moderated by Chris Nash (ENS) and Mark Manly (UNHCR)

A key challenge for UNHCR and NGOs is to find effective ways to reduce and prevent statelessness caused by arbitrary deprivation of nationality, state succession, discrimination against women and technical gaps in nationality laws and inadequate documentation procedures. In 2014, UNHCR is launching a ten year campaign to eliminate statelessness. Resolving large-scale, protracted situations of statelessness is crucial to achieving this objective. The goals of this ambitious Campaign can only be achieved with the full engagement of a strong network of stakeholders, including UNHCR, civil society actors and government champions.

This session will discuss opportunities for collaboration between NGOs and UNHCR to end stateless within a decade. Examples of initiatives being taken around the world will frame the discussion:

- (a) **A personal story of overcoming statelessness** (Lara Chen Tienshi, APPRN/ Stateless Network)

Lara is a Representative of the Stateless Network which she established in 2009. Her own experiences as a stateless woman inspired her to start her research on the life of stateless people and address the issue as a way of supporting stateless people in Japan. The Stateless Network endeavors to raise social awareness and provide legal support to stateless people.

- (b) **Resolving statelessness in the Dominican Republic** (Bridget Wooding – Observatory Caribbean Migrants)

On 23 September 2013, a ruling by the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic deprived tens of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent of their nationality, rendering them stateless. Many of these people had been born in the Dominican Republic, had lived in the country for generations and had previously

been recognized as Dominican citizens. The Observatory Caribbean Migrants, based in the Dominican Republic, is engaged in policy advocacy, research and networking to achieve the rapid restoration of the nationality of individuals affected by the ruling.

(c) **Ending gender discrimination in nationality laws** (Radha Govil, Statelessness Section, UNHCR)

Nationality laws that prevent women from conferring their nationality to their children on an equal basis as men cause statelessness when fathers are unable to transmit their nationality. However, an increasing number of countries are reforming their laws and only 27 countries retain this form of discrimination in their legislation. Momentum on this issue has also led to the recent formation of a new coalition of civil society, academic institutions and UNHCR, which is planning a multifaceted campaign to end gender discrimination in nationality laws, and thereby improve the participation of women in nationality matters.

(d) **Preventing childhood statelessness** (Laura van Waas, Tilburg University)

It is estimated that half of the world's stateless people are children, most of whom have been stateless since birth. This simple fact betrays a serious failing of the international community, which has recognized since as early as 1930 the need to ensure that all children enjoy a nationality. Key to the success of the ten year campaign to end statelessness will be to stop the problem from spreading to a new generation. Fortunately, childhood statelessness is entirely avoidable. International law clearly sets out the means by which to achieve this. Actors in Europe, including the European Network on Statelessness, are already taking stock of the gaps and good practices in order to set a course for action.