The Campaign to End Statelessness

July 2016 Update

#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness

In cooperation with
UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON.

Mobilizing governments and civil society

Two resolutions related to statelessness were adopted during the 32nd regular session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) held during June and July, 2016:

- The HRC Resolution "**The right to a nationality: women's equal nationality rights in law and in practice**," urges States to eliminate gender discriminatory nationality laws and practices – a **major cause of statelessness** globally. It also calls on OHCHR and UNHCR to organise an inter-sessional workshop to showcase best practices to promote women's equal nationality rights in law and in practice. The resolution was adopted by consensus and had more than 100 State co-sponsors.

- A second HRC Resolution "**Human rights and arbitrary deprivation of nationality**," calls on States to refrain from enacting or maintaining legislation that would arbitrarily deprive persons of their nationality on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, including disability.

On 23 June, a number of UN agencies and sister agencies including OHCHR, UNDP, DOCO, WHO, WFP, UN Women and the World Bank participated in a **"New Frontiers Dialogue on Statelessness"** co-chaired by UNHCR and UNICEF in New York. Participants reaffirmed the role that different agencies have to play in advancing the eradication of statelessness consistent with the 2011 "**Guidance Note of the Secretary General: The United Nations and Statelessness.**" The Dialogue identified areas for enhanced capacity-building of UN Country Teams to support work on statelessness and agreed on elements of an Action Plan.

Zhirair Chichian, a young stateless man from Georgia, opened the **2016 UNHCR Annual NGO Consultations** with a **moving speech.** In addition to a well-attended **Food for Thought on Statelessness** session organized by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, speakers on statelessness were featured throughout the NGO Consultations covering statelessness-related issues in the Dominican Republic, Malaysia, Nepal, Russia, Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

Participants from around the world at UNHCR's 5th Annual Global NGO Statelessness Retreat.

On 19–20 June, UNHCR convened **the 5th Annual Global NGO Statelessness Retreat**. Twenty-eight NGOs and International Organisations from 20 countries met to discuss and develop new plans to address statelessness. Topics of discussion included: steps to be taken towards a coalition on realizing children's right to nationality; how to further strengthen engagement with UN human rights mechanisms; and how to make greater use of the Sustainable Development Goals to resolve statelessness.

On 9 June, delegations from 22 Missions to the United Nations in Geneva came together at the Finnish Permanent Mission in Geneva for the third meeting of the "**Friends of the Campaign to End Statelessness.**" Among other topics, participants discussed the HRC Resolution "The right to a nationality: women's equal nationality rights in law and in practice" and the 19 September Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly. The Friends were provided with a briefing on the situation in post-election Myanmar. The Friends also discussed the disappointing result of the public **Constitutional Referendum in the Bahamas** on 7 June, which saw the defeat of four Bills aiming to remove gender discrimination in nationality matters from the Constitution.

At the regional level, the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** and UNHCR met in Dakar on 5–7 April to follow-up on the implementation of the **Abidjan Declaration**. The meeting resulted in a **draft regional action plan** that lays out the steps that States and ECOWAS need to take to fulfil the commitments in the Declaration. The draft plan covers activities aimed at ending statelessness in West Africa while taking into account the different roles and responsibilities of ECOWAS, Member States, UNHCR and other important stakeholders. The next step is to submit the plan for formal approval by ECOWAS Member States. There is some momentum towards transforming the Abidjan Declaration commitments into a binding treaty among ECOWAS Member States.

In **Southern Africa**, 26 legal practitioners including government officials, civil society and UNHCR gathered from 18–22 April in Pretoria for a **regional statelessness course** co-hosted by UNHCR and the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion.

In Central Asia, on 9 June, participants from 10 NGOs working in **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan** and **Uzbekistan** signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** to establish the **Central Asia Civil Society Network on Statelessness**. Network members are in the process of developing a webpage for the network. Central Asia is joining a growing number of civil society networks dedicated to addressing statelessness, including those in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

Members of the newly established Central Asia Network on Statelessness.

In the Americas, from 31 May to 2 June, the **Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness (ANA)**, the Center for Human Rights of the Diego Portales University and UNHCR held a **training workshop on nationality and statelessness for non-governmental organizations and legal clinics of the Americas**. A total of 22 participants from 13 countries in Latin Americas and the Caribbean attended the workshop held in Chile.

At its 46th Regular Session from 13–15 June, **the General Assembly of the Organization of American States** adopted a [resolution](#) promoting civil registration, accession to the Statelessness Conventions, compliance with international standards, establishment of statelessness determination procedures, elimination of gender discrimination from nationality laws, and the resolution of existing cases of statelessness.

From 23–26 June, UNHCR and the **Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** jointly organised a workshop on Statelessness and Internal Displacement. Government officials from key line ministries, civil society, other UN agencies and the African Union participated. The workshop closely examined the international and domestic legal frameworks on nationality and statelessness and recommended a number of practical actions to be taken by the Ethiopian Government and UNHCR.

In Kenya, from 11–14 April, UNHCR participated in a workshop organised by NAMATI and the Nubian Rights Forum for **paralegals working on citizenship, documentation and nationality issues**. Areas explored included data collection methods, tools and challenges faced by paralegals working on these issues. Priority areas for advocacy were discussed, and a new national coalition on citizenship and nationality empowerment in **Kenya**, called "CONCISE," was established.

On 7–8 June in **Malawi** a statelessness workshop was co-led by the **Malawian government, Lawyers for Human Rights and UNHCR**. Senior Government officials and Members of the Parliament of Malawi strengthened their knowledge of the international legal framework governing statelessness.

On 31 May in South Africa, UNHCR and IOM held a joint workshop for social workers from Johannesburg's Department of Social Development focused on the **protection of stateless individuals**.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, during April and June, UNHCR and partners provided statelessness training to more than 600 people, including lawyers, police officers, community and religious leaders, civil registry officials, and many other stakeholders.

In **Malaysia**, in May and June, UNHCR organized a series of **trainings and lectures at University College Sedaya International (USCI) Campus** to engage young scholars motivated to help end childhood statelessness. In cooperation with UNHCR and the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (DHRRA), USCI students launched an education campaign called **#JourneytoBelong** to promote children's right to a nationality. The education campaign is targeting primary school-level teachers and students.

In **Bangladesh**, in April and May, UNHCR and the Law Reporters Forum jointly organised two **workshops** for a total of 80 **journalists** and members of the Forum on **the Reduction of Statelessness and the Role of the Media**.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with **Action 1 of the Global Action Plan (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness)** the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and civil society have implemented a **referral mechanism to facilitate legal aid** to those claiming nationality.

In **Malaysia**, UNHCR, working closely with an NGO **(DHRRA)**, continued to provide legal assistance services to stateless persons. By the end of June, 700 persons out of **12,341 stateless persons registered with DHRRA had acquired nationality**. 7,918 nationality applications had been submitted to the authorities while 3,723 applications remain at the pre-submission stage.

Since November 2015, more than 5000 stateless persons have acquired **Thai nationality**, bringing the total registered stateless population down to 438,821. In May 2016, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior issued **"Guiding Procedures on Determination of Nationality Law and Solutions for Resolving the Issue of Individual Legal Status"** which aim to implement King Bhumibol Adulyadej's guidance as set out in his address of 18 February 2001: *"…There are groups of people who have lived in Thailand for a long time, but they are never considered as real Thais. They have lived here and some of them were even born here, but they do not benefit from belonging to Thailand. They should be equally treated on the same basis. If people in Thailand feel unhappy and neglected while living in the country, this will definitely affect national security…"*

On **Action 2 (Ensure that no child is born stateless)**, from 27–30 June in **Sierra Leone**, an inter-agency mission, which included UNHCR, undertook an assessment of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) intended to help the government **reform its CRVS system, including birth registration**.

© UNHCR / I. Pirveli

Nino was recognised as a stateless person pursuant to the Georgian statelessness determination procedure in 2015. She is now on a path to acquiring Georgian citizenship, which will help her to realise her dream of becoming a professional musician.

On **Action 3 (Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws)**, the parliaments of Bahrain and Kuwait are examining NGO proposals to review their respective nationality laws and consider reforms that would allow **women to confer citizenship to their children at birth**.

On **Action 6 (Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate naturalization)**, a number of States in the Americas have made progress. On April 7, **Costa Rica** established a [statelessness determination procedure](#) that will take effect in October 2016. The **Bolivian Ministry of Government** adopted a resolution to **facilitate the naturalization of refugees and stateless persons** by removing requirements relating to a minimum period of residence and by significantly reducing the application fees. In **Brazil**, a new [decree](#) allows for naturalization without having to renounce any nationality of origin.

On 13 May in **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR organized a one-day **introductory training** for authorities working in the field of migration and citizenship, where information **on statelessness determination procedures** was provided and Georgian Government and NGO experts shared good practices based on their experience.

In April in **Greece**, new [asylum legislation](#) was adopted and grants the Asylum Authority the competence to apply the 1954 Convention. It also establishes that a **Presidential Decree** will **regulate the procedures for determining the status of a stateless person**.

Examples of countries that have established statelessness determination procedures can be found in UNHCR's recently published Good Practices Paper: [**Good Practices Paper on Establishing Statelessness Determination Procedures to Protect Stateless Persons**](#).

With respect to **Action 7 (Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness)**, on 21 June the Sangguniang Bayan (Municipal Council) of Glan, in Southern Mindanao, **the Philippines**, passed a resolution exempting persons of Indonesian descent residing in the Municipality from civil registration fees and fees for the correction of entries in the civil registry. This will facilitate the provision of civil documentation and the resolution of nationality status of persons of Indonesian descent in the area.

On **Action 9 (Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions)**, [Mali and Sierra Leone](#) acceded to both **Statelessness Conventions** on 9 May and 27 May respectively.

On **Action 10 (Improve quantitative and qualitative data on statelessness populations)**, in June UNHCR published the results of a survey among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in **Serbia** in a report "[**Persons at Risk of Statelessness in Serbia – Progress Report 2010–2015.**](#)" The report highlights that the number of persons without identity documents among these populations dropped significantly over the past four years (from 6.8% to 3.9%). The report recommends steps to address the final obstacles to birth and residence registration and issuance of identity cards –steps essential to confirming nationality.

Also with respect to **Action 10**, in April, a **pilot survey** was launched by UNHCR in collaboration with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics in Kwale and Malindi counties in **Kenya**. The aim of the survey was to collect information on stateless groups living in those counties and to test questions related to nationality and statelessness for inclusion of such questions in the next national census to be held in 2019. A more formal survey in the same areas is expected to be conducted in August 2016.

Mapping studies to better identify the number and situations of stateless persons are also ongoing in **Benin, Gambia, Ghana** and **Mali**.

Musicians in Senegal have joined renown Senegalese artist Cheikh Lo to support the #IBelong Campaign. Cheikh Lo was recently nominated as a UNHCR High Profile Supporter.
© David Lopy

Campaign publicity

In April, the UNHCR Regional Office for Central Asia issued its first **Regional Newsletter** covering efforts to address statelessness in **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan** and **Turkmenistan**.

Also in April, UNHCR launched a **mass awareness-raising campaign** on statelessness in **Burkina Faso**. A "**statelessness caravan**" travelled throughout the country to sensitize the local population and authorities about the causes and consequences of the problem.

In **Senegal,** UNHCR, in collaboration with Doxandem, a Senegalese youth association, organized a month-long **travelling exhibition on statelessness in the suburbs of Dakar**.

In **Malaysia**, birth registration to prevent statelessness was the focus of an initiative by the NGO, Voice of the Children, which launched the **Bring to Light/stateless children campaign**. Universal birth registration and obtaining civil registration documents remains a significant challenge, particularly among hard-to-reach and mixed-migratory communities in the State of Sabah, **East Malaysia**.

Upcoming events

On 15–16 September in Ashgabat, **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government, is organizing a **Regional Conference on Statelessness.**

Also in September, UNHCR and Viet Nam's Representatives to the **ASEAN Commission** on the Promotion and Protection on the Rights of Women and Children will co-host a workshop to **develop a project on the right to a nationality** for potential inclusion in the ASEAN Commission's 2016–2020 Workplan.

UNHCR continues to strengthen its **collaboration with the League of Arab States** on a range of protection issues, including access to nationality, birth registration and civil status documentation, with a joint technical meeting planned on these issues in October.

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!

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

In cooperation with
UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON.

unhcr.org/ibelong