The Campaign to End Statelessness

September 2015 Update

#IBELONG

Join us in our campaign to end statelessness

UNHCR
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Mobilizing governments and civil society

In July and August, a significant step towards strengthening legal frameworks on the right to a nationality was taken as the **African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights** adopted a **draft Protocol on the Right to Nationality**; an additional protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The draft Protocol, adopted during an Extraordinary Session in Nairobi, has been a work in progress over the past year, with input from UNHCR and other experts. Its aim is to fulfil the promise of the right to a nationality and the eradication of statelessness in Africa. The adoption of the protocol by the ACHPR is a critical step as it paves the way for the text to be examined and eventually approved by African Union Member States in 2016.

Three NGO panellists working in the Bahamas, Kyrgyzstan and the Middle East and North Africa, headlined the well-attended statelessness session at this year's **UNHCR Annual NGO Consultations** on 3 July. They explained some of the myriad ways in which civil society is helping to implement UNHCR's Global Action Plan to End Statelessness. Grassroots knowledge of history, politics and connections with affected communities were revealed to be some of the critical ingredients for success. Innovative methods and tools (mobile clinics, strategic litigation, building consensus in communities, advocacy with governments, and use of social media) targeted to the reality on the ground to address statelessness were also raised.

Following the NGO Consultations, 25 NGOs from 20 countries gathered near Lausanne, Switzerland from 3-5 July for the **4th Annual Global Statelessness Retreat**. Sessions on resolving existing situations of statelessness (Action 1 of the Global Action Plan), preventing denial, loss or deprivation of nationality on discriminatory grounds (Action 4), improving quantitative and qualitative data (Action 10), tackling childhood statelessness (Action 2), improving birth registration to prevent statelessness (Action 7), removing gender discrimination from nationality laws (Action 3) and using the media and developing and enhancing regional networks were part of the agenda. NGOs from all global regions all explained how they are implementing the relevant Actions, shared their success stories and indicated how they have overcome obstacles.

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Participants at the civil society retreat on Resolving Statelessness in Asia and the Pacific

Civil society groups in Asia and the Pacific recently agreed to establish a new and dedicated network to prevent and eradicate statelessness in the region and advocate for the right of every person to a nationality. This **commitment** was announced on 16 June at the end of a two-day civil society retreat on Resolving Statelessness in Asia and the Pacific held at Mahidol University in Salaya, Thailand. The retreat was organised jointly by the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University and UNHCR. It drew over 40 participants from non-governmental organizations and academia from Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The **European Network on Statelessness conference "None of Europe's children should be stateless"**, co-hosted by UNHCR, held in Budapest on 2-3 June brought together 100 participants from over 30 countries in the region. To help guide joint efforts to end childhood statelessness in Europe the conference was organized around a number of themes: improving data on children's access to nationality and birth registration; shaping a research agenda to further understand the causes, scale and consequences of childhood statelessness and creating the public and political space to more effectively respond to childhood statelessness through awareness raising and social mobilisation. After two days of fruitful discussions a **conference action statement** was presented and discussed at the closing session.

In June, UNHCR, the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) and Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) organized the **first regional meeting** of the **Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness** (ANA), which took place in San Jose, Costa Rica. Over 30 participating NGOs from across the region discussed common challenges relating to statelessness and how to move forward to implement UNHCR's Global Action Plan and the Brazil Plan of Action.

Media impact of the Campaign

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Because of gender discrimination in the Lebanese nationality law, Rama, 9, is stateless as her mother, Amal, is prevented from passing on her nationality.

Watch **Rama's story** from Lebanon. It's amongst UNHCR's most-watched videos of the year on Facebook and Twitter!

Read our latest **#IBELONG web story** on **Moldova's** achievements to prevent and resolve statelessness for more than 200,000 people.

UNHCR's office in **Montenegro** promoted the Campaign among university students, adding over 250 sign-ups to the Open Letter. A sign-up event in **Angola** increased the signatures to the Open letter by 800. We are now over **10,000 signatures**!

As this is a ten-year global initiative, we must do everything we can to continue increasing visibility of the #IBELONG Campaign and to promote 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, PLEASE sign the **Open Letter to End Statelessness**. While there is growing public support for the Campaign, we need more organisations concerned about statelessness to sign and disseminate the Open Letter. Do help us.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

Armenia amended its citizenship law to ensure that no child is born stateless, thereby implementing Action 2 of the Global Action Plan (Ensure that no child is born stateless). These changes, adopted by the Armenian National Assembly on 7 May 2015, will ensure that all children born on Armenian territory who would otherwise be stateless acquire Armenian nationality. These, and a number of other measures aimed at preventing childhood statelessness, bring Armenia's nationality law into greater compliance with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Thanks in part to UNHCR's multi-year advocacy efforts, the Parliament of **Montenegro** adopted amendments to the Law on Non-Contentious Proceedings which introduce cost-free judicial procedures for late birth registration of individuals born outside the formal healthcare system. The amendments to the law are expected to reduce the risk of statelessness that affects certain populations in Montenegro, in particular the Roma, thereby implementing Action 7 of the Global Action Plan (Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness). The most recent Montenegrin population census in 2011 revealed that there were 2,339 children who claimed to be without any citizenship. The number of children without birth registration is not known.

As part of its efforts to promote good practices of States to address statelessness, UNHCR hosted a **Good Practices Meeting on the Identification and Protection of Stateless Persons** in Brussels on 7 and 8 May 2015. This meeting brought together 35 participants from 16 countries. Those from States such as France, Georgia, Moldova and the UK shared their experiences of setting up procedures to identify stateless migrants to allow them to enjoy their basic human rights. In attendance were also participants from countries such as Argentina, the Netherlands and Peru, which are looking into establishing such procedures. The discussions will feed into a new Good Practices Paper on Action 6 of the Global Action Plan (Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalisation), to be published shortly.

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A Montenegrin woman holding her newly registered child

With the recent accession of Belize to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness on 14 August 2015, progress has been made regarding the implementation of **Action 9 of the Global Action Plan** (Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions). The 1961 Convention now has 64 States party and more accessions are imminent. On 10 September the Italian Senate approved the Accession Law to the 1961 Convention. Italy will become a new State Party once its instrument of accession is deposited.

Upcoming Events

The **United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda** will be held from 25 - 27 September 2015, in New York. Countries will have the opportunity to adopt a set of global goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. The adoption of **Sustainable Development Goal 16.9**, which relates to the provision of legal identity, including through birth registration, will be of critical importance to the #IBELONG Campaign to End Statelessness.

On 27 September, UN Women and the Government of China are hosting a Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in New York. This event will commemorate 20 years since governments adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a comprehensive roadmap for gender equality. Heads of State will have the opportunity to deliver commitments for the achievement of gender equality within a timeframe aligned to the post-2015 development agenda. UNHCR is advocating with States for commitments to remove gender discrimination in nationality laws, one of the major causes of statelessness around the world.

Planning for the **1st anniversary of UNHCR's Campaign to End Statelessness** is well underway. To mark this important occasion, we are launching a **Special Report which looks at the impact of statelessness on children and youth**.

Throughout July and August, our statelessness team has been out and about, speaking with young stateless people about their hopes, fears and dreams in Côte D'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Georgia, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia and Thailand. Their voices will feature in this report.

Campaign Resources

Want to support the Campaign? Take a look at our **materials page** 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!

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