

## **First Global Forum on Statelessness: New Directions in Research and Policy Key Outcomes**

### **Overview:**

The First Global Forum on Statelessness (Global Forum) was held from 15 – 17 September 2014 at the Peace Palace in The Hague, the Netherlands. The event was co-organised and hosted by UNHCR and the Statelessness Programme of Tilburg University in the context of the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. The Global Forum also heralded the launch of UNHCR's Campaign to End Statelessness, on 4 November 2014. Many of the discussions during the Global Forum were therefore focused on the overarching question of finding definitive solutions to statelessness.

The aims of the Global Forum were to:

- Share good practices and challenges in policy development on statelessness;
- Explore and debate contemporary statelessness research and policy;
- Encourage new research on statelessness across and between a range of academic disciplines;
- Provide a platform for the voices of stateless persons in the development of new research and policy directions; and
- Strengthen existing partnerships and build new networks among different stakeholders engaged on statelessness.

300 participants attended the Global Forum from over 70 countries and a wide range of backgrounds. Participants included: 65 individuals from NGOs; 4 individuals from National Human Rights Institutions; 71 academics; 42 state officials; 41 UNHCR staff members; 20 participants from intergovernmental organizations; 20 legal practitioners; 7 stateless persons; 3 journalists; 3 videographers/photographers and 2 judges.

Three sub-themes, Stateless Children, Statelessness and Security and Responses to Statelessness, informed the content of the presentations, roundtables and discussions. The Global Forum was also addressed by the following keynote speakers:

- Volker Türk, Director, Division of International Protection, UNHCR
- Irene Khan, Director-General, International Development Law Organisation
- Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Giving stateless and formerly stateless individuals an opportunity to explain their experiences was an important aspect of the Global Forum, and two panel sessions, moderated respectively by UNHCR's Honorary Lifetime Goodwill Ambassador Barbara Hendricks and journalist and critic A.A. Gill, provided a platform for these individuals to tell their powerful and moving stories. To represent the millions of stateless people who were not able to participate directly in the event, an award-winning photography exhibition entitled 'Nowhere People' by Greg Constantine, brought the images and stories of stateless individuals around the world to the Global Forum.

## **Key Outcomes:**

The Global Forum provided an unprecedented opportunity for a wide-range of actors to meet and share their experiences, research, plans and ideas to better understand and take action to address and resolve statelessness. Two organisations, the Network of European National Human Rights Institutions and the World Council of Churches, also used the occasion of the Global Forum to present respectively a joint statement on statelessness and an outcome document on statelessness. Separate meetings on statelessness were also organised by the Open Society Foundations, the European Network on Statelessness and the World Council of Churches, on the margins of the Global Forum, thereby building on the key outcomes generated by the event itself. Many informal meetings were held between participants as a direct result of the networking opportunity afforded by the Global Forum.

Key outcomes of particular interest to UNHCR arising from the Forum are grouped below under three thematic areas around which the Global Forum was structured:

### ***Stateless Children***

- More research should be undertaken to clarify the circumstances in which lack of birth registration can give rise to a risk of statelessness, which is likely to vary depending on the national context and individual circumstances.
- The relationship between civil registration, civil documentation, legal identity, nationality and related documentation and the prevention of statelessness may become an increasingly important area of research and policy, particularly in the context of the negotiation of the sustainable development goals in 2015. There are opportunities to mainstream measures to increase levels of civil registration of stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness within development planning and projects, including existing national and regional civil registration and vital statistics initiatives.
- The issue of statelessness in surrogacy situations is an emerging issue. Further discussions with States and legal practitioners are required and UNHCR guidance needed on surrogacy as it relates to the 1961 Convention.
- The ineffective implementation of the safeguard against statelessness at birth in national and international law presents an opportunity for strategic litigation at the national and regional level, where applicable.

### ***Statelessness and Security***

- In light of recent trends in certain countries, UNHCR's position on the issue of denationalization leading to statelessness as a form of persecution needs to be discussed.
- Further research between the links between forced migration, protracted refugee situations, statelessness and durable solutions is required. Practical solutions need to be further explored and discussed between UNHCR, partners and other stakeholders.
- As the global security landscape continues to shift, and in many cases, worsen, windows of opportunity to take action on statelessness need to be grasped. In addition, the ability and approaches that can be used to continue most effectively address statelessness in the context of volatile or charged political environments also requires further consideration.

## ***Responses to Statelessness***

- Community legal assistance projects, such as those supported by OSF and Namati in Kenya, and Bangladesh, appear to be an effective way to achieve real progress in assisting stateless individuals through empowering stateless communities to take action to alleviate their own situation and those of their communities. Support to and expansion of such projects should be considered.
- There are opportunities for sharing and leveraging of expertise and tools amongst community legal assistance providers at a regional and global level which could be facilitated by funders such as UNHCR and OSF.
- Statelessness determination procedures should not be an end in themselves. Their establishment should be accompanied by an efficient, facilitated pathway to regularization of legal status and naturalisation, thereby increasing protection and leading to a reduction in statelessness.
- More comprehensive identification of the size and situation of stateless populations is necessary to bolster advocacy efforts to find solutions. A more unified approach to measurement standards and methodologies to undertake mapping studies is required.
- Law reform initiatives must also be carried through to the implementation stage. This will require advocacy and support to ensure that human resources, administrative structures and political will are developed to effect real change.
- Stronger engagement of the EU on statelessness within the EU and in its foreign policy needs to be developed.
- The challenge of presenting the human stories behind statelessness must be addressed. There is a need to increase the level of engagement of UNHCR offices with stateless communities and individuals, and to ensure that their stories are disseminated in a manner that assists and empowers them.
- The analysis of nationality laws remains key to understanding the causes of statelessness, however it was also recognized that it is crucial to obtain accurate data on how nationality laws are applied in practice if a full picture is to emerge.