

**Joint Statement of the ECOWAS Ministers responsible for nationality matters on the Ministerial Meeting for the Validation and Adoption of the Banjul Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in the ECOWAS Region**

1. The *Regional Ministerial Meeting for the Validation and Adoption of the Regional Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in West Africa* was convened in Banjul, The Gambia, on 9 May 2017, under the chairmanship of the Republic of Liberia.
2. The Meeting was attended by the Ministers in charge of nationality or their designated representatives.
3. The Meeting was opened by His Excellency Mrs. Fatoumatta Tambajang, Vice President of The Gambia.
4. The ECOWAS Commission and Court of Justice were represented at high level, including by Dr. Fatima Dia Sow, ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender. The Meeting was also attended by Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, UN Secretary General's Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel; Mr. Volker Türk, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection; Ms. Liz Ahua, Regional Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Ms. Marie Pierre Poirier, Regional Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Mr. Mabingue Ngom, Regional Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Gregory Toulmin, Country Program Coordinator of the World Bank as observers.
5. Upon reviewing the significant progress made since the adoption of the *Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness* adopted at the 47<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the ECOWAS Summit of Heads of States and Governments on 19 May 2015, the ECOWAS Ministers responsible for nationality matters welcome the many notable achievements made thus far, including:
  - The official nomination of Government Focal Points for issues relating to statelessness in almost all Member States (commitment 22);
  - The development of National Action Plans by twelve (12) States, two of which have been approved at the ministerial level and one at the presidential level (commitment 24);
  - The accession by three (3) Member States to the international statelessness conventions (commitments 4 and 14), bringing the number of ECOWAS Member States parties to the 1954 convention on the Status of Stateless persons, and the 1961 convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, respectively to 12 and 11;
  - The commissioning of studies commissioned on statelessness in four (4) States (commitment 1);
  - The reform of nationality legislation underway in 7 countries (commitments 2 and 3).
6. They strongly support the efforts of the African Union to provide the continent with an African Protocol on the Right to Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa, and will work as a block to support the adoption of this instrument.

7. The ECOWAS Ministers responsible for nationality matters reaffirm the commitment of their Governments to end statelessness in West Africa by 2024, including by taking the appropriate measures to accede to the international statelessness conventions; to reform their nationality legislation, to guarantee universal birth registration; to ensure that all eligible people obtain documents establishing their identity and nationality; to inform and sensitise the public on the risks of statelessness and the paramount importance of nationality.
8. They stress the importance of reforming and harmonising their nationality laws with international conventions on statelessness and other human rights standards, to ensure that every child born or found on their territories will acquire a nationality if otherwise stateless.
9. They emphasize that lack of civil registration is a crucial risk of statelessness, and they reaffirm the importance of prioritising the issuance of relevant documents to people eligible to their nationality, by identifying and adjusting innovative practices from the region and elsewhere.
10. In order to reach their goal to eradicate statelessness by 2024, they underscore the importance of partnership with the UN and international organisations, including the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They further emphasize the importance of working together with civil society, universities and research institutions.
11. After discussions, deliberations, and review of the report of the Experts' meeting, the ECOWAS Ministers in charge of nationality matters:
  - *Validate* the Banjul Regional Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in West Africa that lists detailed and timetabled measures, based on the Abidjan Declaration, and guide the commitment of their Governments to end statelessness;
  - *Submit* the Banjul Regional Plan of Action to the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and the ECOWAS Summit of Heads of State and Government for adoption;
  - *Commit* to meet on a regular basis, under the auspices of ECOWAS, to review progress of implementation and share best practices.

**Done in Banjul, The Gambia, on 9 May 2017**