

Declaration on Statelessness

We, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) in West Africa first gathered at a meeting in Saly Portudal, Senegal, in April 2014 to discuss our engagement on statelessness, and gathered again here in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, during the expert meeting on 23-24 February 2015,

Recalling that NHRIs participated fully at the High level meeting of AU supported by the Un High Commissioner for Refugees held in December 2013 to chart a regional path for reduction of statelessness which was also attended by major human rights stakeholders across the continent

Recalling the Banjul Appeal and the commitment made at that moment by NHRIs, member states, judicial and non-judicial bodies, the African Union and its Specialized Institutions, the Civil Society Organizations (CSO), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

Reaffirming our strong commitment to the Banjul Appeal., and in particular the roles and functions that were assigned to NHRIs

Noting that National Human Rights Institutions have mandates to promote and protect the rights of all persons irrespective of status and without discrimination of any kind,

Regretting that, the rate of ratification of the 1954 Convention relating to the status of stateless persons and the 1961 Convention on the reduction of statelessness is not yet satisfactory, and that statelessness remains a phenomenon little understood by both governmental and non-governmental actors.

We the members of the Network of National Human Rights institutions in West Africa hereby declare as follows;

- 1- we recognize that statelessness leads to violation of several human rights and therefore a situation of real concern to NHRIs
- 2- we shall henceforth take special interest in the protection of women and children who are stateless or are affected by statelessness.
- 3- in view of the serious nature of deprivation of the human rights of stateless persons, concerted effort deployed jointly and severally by NHRIs individually and collectively through the Network can make a difference in the prevention and reduction of statelessness,
- 4- we undertake to lead efforts to research and document situations faced by stateless persons;
- 5- we take it upon ourselves as a group to launch a campaign to encourage all members of ECOWAS to ratify or accede to all international and

regional instruments that seek to reduce or eliminate statelessness; in that regard, we encourage states to ratify and harmonize the 1954 and 1961 Conventions;

- 6- we undertake to monitor state actions for the continued adherence to the obligations contained in the treaties and international conventions that they are bound by;
- 7- Noting with regret that the African Charter on Human and People's Rights does not include the right to a nationality, we call upon States to adopt, without delay, a Protocol relating to right to nationality with no restrictions;
- 8- we undertake to lead campaigns to sensitize and inform Parliamentary Institutions, national authorities, Schools and Universities, as well as civil society organizations on the question of statelessness;
- 9- We will work to improve the level of understanding about statelessness in order to engage and empower the general public;
- 10- we undertake to Promote access to justice for stateless persons;
- 11- we shall jointly assist all persons identified as stateless within the region by utilizing all legal mechanisms including the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice to enforce the rights of stateless persons.

- 12- we call upon states to apply the principles of equality and non-discrimination in all administrative practices and legislation concerning nationality;
- 13- we urge states to take all necessary measure to ensure universal birth registration;
- 14- we will ensure to take into account statelessness in NHRIs' annual reports and the governmental reports presented in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR); In association with ECOWAS Commission and its relevant Institution, the Network would make statelessness a priority and a basic requirement in human rights reporting to regional and international treaty monitoring mechanisms
- 15- we will work towards establishing working groups with civil society organizations that engage with statelessness;
- 16- we will Collaborate with the UNHCR and actively identify suitable areas for partnership;
- 17- And we pledge to cooperate with all institutions working on statelessness and to use the best of our endeavours to achieve all the above declarations and take such other steps that would prevent statelessness and afford remedies to stateless persons.

