

**Statement By  
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At the First Ministerial Conference on Statelessness  
Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire  
February 25, 2015**

Honorable Gnenema Mamadou Coulibaly, Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Public Liberty, Republic of Cote D'Ivoire  
Excellency, Dr. Toga Gayewea McIntosh, Vice President of the ECOWAS Commission  
Excellency, Mohamed Ibm Chambas, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to West Africa  
Excellency Antonio Gutiérrez, UN High Commissioner for Refugees,  
Representatives of UNHCR and other UN Agencies  
Ministers of National Governments  
Heads of delegations  
Representatives of NGOs and INGOs,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you greetings on behalf of the President of the Republic of Liberia, Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and the Government and People of Liberia on this auspicious occasion and to extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the Government and People of the Cote D'Ivoire, including in particular your Excellency, Mr. Gnenema Mamadou Coulibaly, Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Public Liberty, for hosting this conference and for the hospitality accorded me and my delegation since our arrival.

Your Excellency, Mr. Antonio Gutiérrez, we salute you for organizing this conference in the West African Sub region, a region that has experienced several civil conflicts over the years, which has left many persons including children within the region stateless. No time is better than now for Governments, civil society and the UN to consult on the challenges posed by statelessness, with the view to taking the appropriate actions to prevent, protecting, and providing durable solutions.

We want to recognize His Excellency, Dr. Toga Gayewea McIntosh, Vice President of ECOWAS Commission, a son of Liberia for chairing this session and for his leadership role in the work of the Commission.

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Statelessness is about human rights and human dignity. The commitment of the Republic of Liberia to human rights, fundamental freedoms and respect for human dignity throughout the world is unparalleled, although punctuated by the events of the civil war. It could be recalled that Liberia was the first West African Country to accede to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Liberia was one of the first signatories to the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and to almost all major international human rights treaties, conventions and instruments.

While we take pride in this, we also recognize that the full domestication of all our international obligations under these instrument, including in particular those on statelessness, with the view to give effect to the realization of the aspirations of those who may need such protection, has been slow. We are aware, for instance, that there are some contradictions in our national laws, particularly between the 1986 Constitution and the 1973 Alien and Nationality law Act, occasioned by our historical development as Nation over a period of 168 years since 1847. These contradictions have led and continue to lead to inconsistent implementation of our nationality legal regime with the potential to create statelessness, especially among children.

In this regard, the Republic of Liberia made two significant pledges at the Ministerial meeting to commemorate the anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1961 Statelessness Convention held in Geneva in December 2012: (i) To amend our 1993 Refugee Act with the objective to “make it conform to international best practices, regional perspective and todays realities” and (ii) To amend the 1973 Alien and Nationality law to address the conflict between Article 20.1 of the Act and Article 28 of the 1986 Constitution regarding the nationality of children born outside Liberia with either parent of Liberia descent. We are pleased to report that significant progress has been made with respect to these pledges.

First, a draft amendment to the Alien and Nationality Law to provide for dual nationality is currently under consideration by the Legislature for enactment, while efforts to amend the 1993 Refugee Act are currently in progress. Her Excellency, the President of Liberia, in her recent State of the Nation Address to the Honorable Legislature, delivered on January 26, 2015, encouraged the Legislature to amend the Refugee Act and to make provision for stateless persons.

Second, early this year, under the instrumentality of the LRRRC, a Stakeholders Workshop on Statelessness was held in Liberia with the view to formulating a procedural steps for the development of a national framework for the protection of Stateless persons in line with the 1954 and 1961 conventions on Statelessness. At the

end of the Workshop, participants taking note of the gaps and challenges existing in the efforts of the Government of Liberia toward preventing, protecting, assisting and providing durable solutions to potential stateless persons, developed a National Plan of Action on Statelessness and called on all relevant authorities and actors to commit to a number of steps including, improving quantitative and qualitative data collection on Stateless populations; granting protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization; removing gender and racial discrimination from the national laws of Liberia; and to ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness.

Third, in 2012, the Government of Liberia in collaboration with UNHCR began the processing of Biometric Passports for former Liberian refugees who opted for local integration in asylum countries. More than 5,000 Liberian Refugees were issued passport and over 900 were red coded. The Government of Liberia has agreed to reexamine the red coded cases and take appropriate action to have it rectified in order to avoid the occurrence of statelessness.

Further, during the inception of the cessation of Sierra Leonean Refugees in 2008, the Government of Liberia granted waiver for resident status to facilitate the expeditious grant of citizenship to former Sierra Leonean Refugees who opted to locally integrate in Liberia. This process assisted former refugees, most of whom were without nationality documentation to attain recognizable status and thus avoid of statelessness.

Moreover, Liberia has taken the lead, through the instrumentality of the UNHCR, to conduct a research on statelessness and on best approaches for the consolidation and reform of existing laws and policies applicable to the protection against statelessness. The research findings are now awaiting validation by major stakeholders to enhance national ownership.

At the institutional level, the Government of Liberia has also put in place several institutional arrangements and structures, including the Law Reform Commission (LRC), the Independent National Human Rights Commission (INHRC), and the Constitutional Review Commission, among others, whose functions individually and collectively, will enhance government's efforts toward preventing, protecting, and providing durable solutions to statelessness in Liberia.

However, as you are quite aware, our progress was interrupted by the deadly Ebola virus disease which dealt devastating blow to all our development efforts, and slowed the pace of implementation of several of our activities. We are pleased, however to report that significant progress has been and that Liberia, except for some few cases in isolated cases, is almost Ebola free. We want to thank the Government of the Cote

D'Ivoire for their support during this period, and to UNHCR for staying with us in Liberia and collaborating with the Government during this difficult period.

Finally, considering the porosity of our borders and the significant progress made by ECOWAS in furtherance of regional collaboration, we recommend that ECOWAS Heads of state adopt a common position aimed at eradicating statelessness in the sub-region, endorsing the Global Action Plan, and putting mechanisms into place to marshal support to end statelessness in the sub-region. Setting up a coordinating body that will have focus persons to follow-up progress made in eradicating statelessness in each country may be a good entry point. We encourage UNHCR and other partners to mobilize support and include in their country programs, planned activities to deal with the issue of statelessness in each state.

Your Excellences, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me close by reiterating that the Government of Liberia remains committed to its pledge to continue with vigorous legal, institutional, and administrative reforms with the view to preventing, protecting, assisting and providing durable solutions to statelessness in Liberia and to working collaboratively at the regional and international levels in this regard.

Thank you and May God Bless us all.