

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
11 – 13 JUNE 2013 - International Conference Center Geneva**

THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

Advocating Together to Resolve Statelessness

Tuesday, 11 June 2013, 14h30 – 18h30 - Room 3

Collaborative advocacy efforts by UNHCR, civil society, academic institutions and stateless persons themselves are vital to resolving statelessness. There are numerous examples of how NGOs, academic bodies and UNHCR have complemented each other in efforts to achieve progress in areas such as reform of nationality laws, creation of determination procedures and accession to the two UN Statelessness Conventions. In many cases, however, joint efforts to tackle statelessness issues have occurred in an *ad hoc* fashion rather than as part of a broader collaborative country-based, regional or international campaign.

More effective strategies, better knowledge and resource sharing, the development of strong, working partnerships and an increase in the number of NGOs working on statelessness worldwide are all necessary ingredients for developing a collective advocacy strategy. With the issue of statelessness firmly on the international human rights agenda and the upcoming commemorations of the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons providing an excellent opportunity to shine the spotlight on statelessness, this session seeks to explore practical ways in which NGOs and UNHCR can better collaborate and advocate for solutions to statelessness.

Advocating for implementation of commitments by States to address statelessness:

Over 100 statelessness-related pledges were made by States at UNHCR's Ministerial Meeting in December 2011. 33 States pledged to accede or take steps to accede to the 1954 Convention and/or the 1961 Convention, while two States pledged to remove reservations. 41 States made statelessness-related pledges in other fields, including:

- reform of nationality laws;
- improvements in civil registration to prevent and reduce statelessness;
- establishment of statelessness determination procedures; and
- surveys or other identification efforts.

Since the Ministerial Meeting, 11 States have completed the following pledges:

- 9 States (Benin, Ecuador, Paraguay, Moldova, Bulgaria, Georgia, Portugal, Honduras and Ukraine) have acceded to one or both of the Statelessness Conventions;
- one State (Hungary) has withdrawn its reservations to the 1954 Convention;
- 3 States (Georgia, Moldova and the Philippines) have adopted a statelessness determination procedure.

States have also made commitments to address statelessness in a number of other fora. At last year's New York Rule of Law Event, on behalf of its Member States, the EU pledged that Member States which have not yet done so would address the issue of statelessness by acceding to the 1954 Convention and by considering accession to the 1961 Convention. A number of States have also committed to addressing statelessness in the context of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council.

Encouraging States to make commitments to resolve statelessness and to act on their commitments requires efforts by a range of stakeholders, including NGOs and UNHCR. Some of the questions this session seeks to explore include:

- What kind of background work and evidence-collecting can NGOs and UNHCR undertake to convince Governments to make commitments to resolve statelessness?
- In which fora are the voices of NGOs most clearly heard?
- What are some of the successful advocacy approaches to ensure that States take action on their commitments?

Advocating to resolve protracted situations of statelessness:

Insufficient progress has been made to resolve protracted situations of statelessness which continue to persist around the globe. Such situations have not only led to long-standing and continuing deprivations of human rights of thousands of people, but are also a root cause of conflict and refugee movements as evidenced by the continuing outflows of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. This session will examine how civil society actors and UNHCR can strengthen their individual and collective efforts to resolve protracted situations of statelessness around the world, with a focus on the situation affecting the Rohingya in Rakhine State. Discussion of strategies to resolve protracted situations of statelessness in other country contexts is also encouraged.

Relevant questions for this session include:

- What are the different and complementary roles that NGOs and UNHCR can play to promote political will to resolve situations of protracted situations?
- What is the human rights impact of protracted statelessness? How can UNHCR and NGOs work with human rights organisations to highlight this link?
- Which advocacy strategies have proven to be most effective in particular country contexts?
- What are effective ways of engaging other actors, including the media, to raise awareness and apply pressure to resolve protracted situations?
- How can NGOs and UNHCR work with stateless people themselves to assist them play an active role in the resolution of their own situations of statelessness?

Advocating for action on statelessness in 2014 in the context of the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons:

Building on the momentum generated by the 2011 Ministerial Meeting of UN Member States, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, 2014 presents an excellent opportunity for NGOs and UNHCR to reinforce awareness and promote action to address statelessness around the globe. UNHCR's aim in 2014 is to raise the profile of statelessness and promote responses by Governments and civil society. Given the focus of the 1954 Convention on standards of treatment for stateless persons, UNHCR is eager to find ways in which to work with civil society actors in 2014 to achieve its commemoration goals and in particular to focus on "The Human Face of Statelessness". One example is the project being undertaken by the Women's Refugee Commission which examines the impact of gender discrimination and reform of nationality laws in four countries in the Middle East and North Africa, which could form part of a global campaign to end gender discrimination in nationality laws.

Points for discussion during this session include:

- How do NGOs intend to use the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention to generate action on statelessness?
- How can NGOs assist UNHCR to raise awareness of the impact of statelessness on individuals and society?
- How can UNHCR assist with the anniversary goals of NGOs? How can NGOs and UNHCR work together to increase accessions to the international instruments on statelessness?
- How can NGOs and UNHCR promote the establishment of statelessness determination procedures to improve the identification of stateless persons and implementation of the 1954 Convention?
- How can empirical research on the impact of statelessness be increased and improved? How can the network of civil society groups and academic institutions working on statelessness be expanded?