

# The Campaign to End Statelessness

December 2017 Update



# #IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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## Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 16 October, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the twelve Member States of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region Member States (ICGLR) gathered in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, and signed the [Declaration of International Conference on the Great Lakes Region \(ICGLR\) Member States on the Eradication of Statelessness](#). With this Declaration, ICGLR Member States committed to reforming their laws and policies related to nationality in line with the ICGLR [Plan of Action to end statelessness](#) and the objectives of the #IBelong Campaign.

As reported in the last Update, the first [Conference for Arab States on Good Practices & Regional Opportunities to Strengthen Women's Nationality Rights](#) was held in Cairo on 1-2 October. The [Outcome Statement](#) adopted during the Conference is now available.

On 2 October, an **OSCE-UNHCR Seminar on Sharing Good Practices on Statelessness** among OSCE participating States took place in Vienna under the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship. Good practice examples from Serbia, the Russian Federation, Moldova and the Central Asian region were presented by government representatives. Ukraine reported on lessons learned

from an OSCE-UNHCR facilitated study visit to Belgrade in August 2017, where a Ukrainian delegation learned from the Serbian experience regarding civil registration and issuance of documents to Roma.

On 6 October, UNHCR's Executive Committee adopted a [Conclusion on Machine-Readable Travel Documents for Refugees and Stateless persons](#). This Conclusion recognizes the importance of travel documents for refugees and stateless persons to facilitate their travel, and stresses the need for all States and other relevant stakeholders to intensify their efforts to create, expand or facilitate access to appropriate durable solutions and complementary pathways for refugees and stateless persons.

On 12 October in Manila, the Philippines, twelve government agencies participated in a [ceremony](#) to sign the **Inter-Agency Agreement on the Protection of Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Stateless Persons in the Philippines**. In the absence of legislation on protection for refugees and stateless persons, this agreement will serve as a legal instrument institutionalizing government services that can be accessed by these populations.



Mivtar and his daughter Lirije's story is featured in UNHCR's report "[This is Our Home](#)".  
© UNHCR / Roger Arnold

On 26-27 October, as part of its #RomaBelong project, The European Network on Statelessness (ENS) launched the report - [Roma Belong – Statelessness, Discrimination and Marginalisation of Roma in the Western Balkans and Ukraine](#) – at a regional conference in Skopje, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The report outlines key recommendations targeted at civil society, funders, national governments and regional stakeholders who can influence and facilitate action to address the statelessness of the Roma. The report was also presented to the European Parliament on 29 November at an event organized by ENS and UNHCR in the context of UNHCR's focus on stateless minorities. The event discussed steps to address statelessness among Roma in countries which are part of the enlargement process, as well as within the EU.

On 28-29 October, the first **Malaysian Youth Congress on Statelessness** was held at University College Sedaya International in Kuala Lumpur. The meeting led to the formation of the Malaysian Youth Network on Statelessness, which aims at mobilizing interested youth to contribute to initiatives on statelessness.

In **India**, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and UNHCR jointly organized two activities. On 30-31 October, a workshop on "**Statelessness and Indian Origin Tamils from Sri Lanka**" took place in Chennai. The training was attended by members of academia,

NGOs, former rehabilitation officials and Indian origin Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. The objective was to enhance understanding regarding statelessness among refugees from Sri Lanka and to propose follow-up actions with the government. On 29-30 November, in collaboration with the Statelessness Network Asia Pacific, the first [South Asian Conference on Statelessness](#) was organized in Mumbai. The objective of the conference was to increase research and advocacy on statelessness and delegates from different parts of India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka attended.

From 30 October to 1 November, the North West University, Mafikeng, **South Africa**, and UNHCR co-organized a [symposium](#) on "The International Human Right to a Nationality, the Prevention of Statelessness, and the Protection of Stateless Individuals in the 21st Century". Legal scholars from nine countries discussed nationality and statelessness in Africa with a view to strengthening academic co-operation.

On 6-8 November, UNHCR held a workshop on statelessness for journalists and others working in media in **Côte d'Ivoire**. A prize for the best news article on statelessness will be announced in early 2018.

On 3 November, the [European Association of former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the](#)

[Council of Europe](#) organized a seminar on statelessness in Valetta, Malta in which UNHCR participated. At the end of the meeting a [Declaration on statelessness in light of mass migration](#) was adopted by the Association.

On 3 November, representatives of Latin American and Caribbean states met for the first [regional meeting to evaluate the implementation of the Brazil Plan of Action](#) (BPA) regarding the eradication of statelessness. States took stock of achievements and identified remaining challenges in order to fulfil the BPA's goal to end statelessness in the region by 2024. The meeting was convened by UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina, and was attended by fourteen government officials along with delegates of MERCOSUR, IPPDH, UNFPA and IOM, as well as representatives from civil society, including the Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness.

On 8-10 November, seventeen Directors of Civil Registries participated in the [XIV Meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, Identity and Vital Statistics](#). UNHCR led discussions on statelessness prevention and solutions through civil registry actions in accordance with the BPA and the international framework for the prevention and reduction of statelessness. In the meeting's final [Declaration](#), the participating Directors agreed that regional cooperation is necessary for granting legal identity for all, including universal birth registration.

On 15 November, a side-event on "Statelessness and Forced Displacement" took place during the thematic consultations on the **Global Compact for Refugees** in Geneva, Switzerland. Presentations from a member of the former Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, Plan International and UNHCR explored the interlinkages between statelessness and forced displacement. The event also highlighted lessons learned and showcased best practices related to identifying stateless persons and reducing the risk of statelessness in situations of forced displacement.

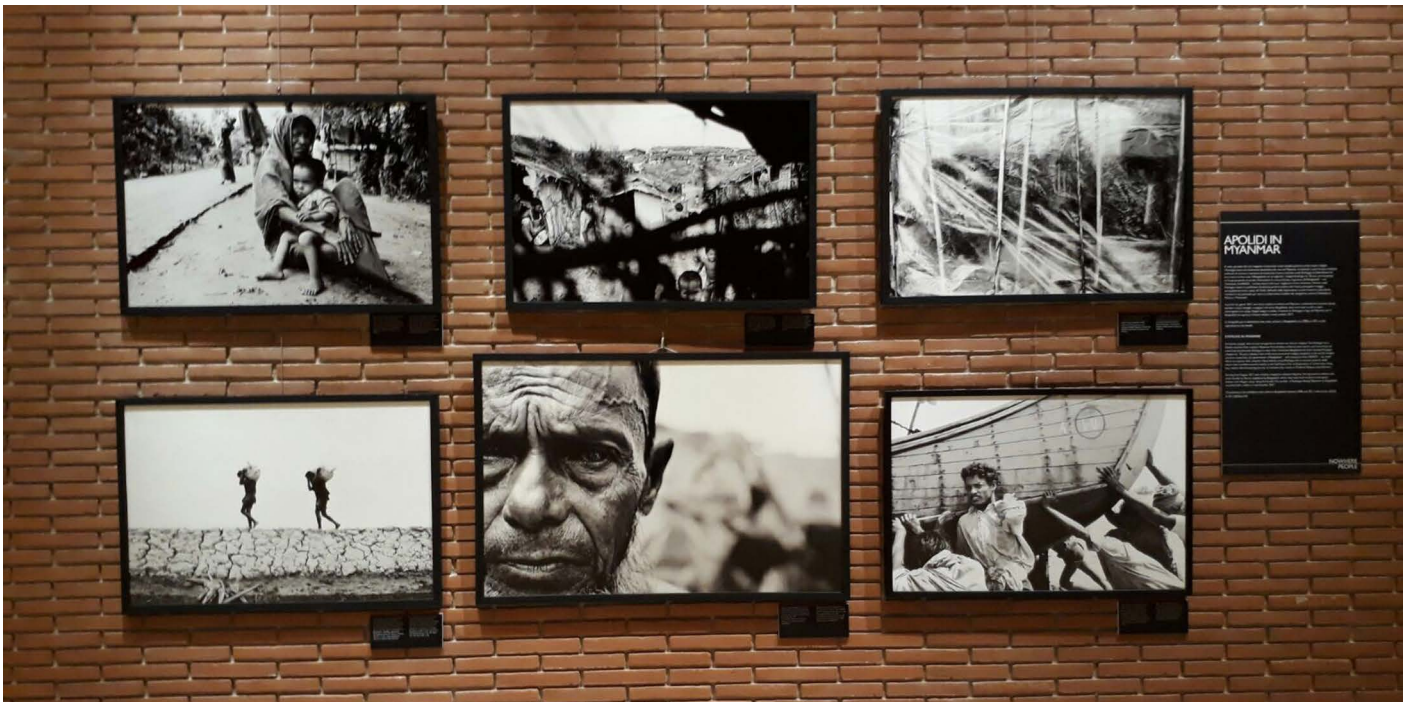
On 16 November, the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a joint [General Comment](#) on **State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return**. The General Comment has a section dedicated to birth registration, the right to a nationality and safeguards against statelessness.



Maha Mamo, stateless refugee in Brazil shares her testimony during the Brazil Plan of Action evaluation meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina  
© UNHCR / Santiago Bernaudo

On 21-23 November, UNHCR, in partnership with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, launched its first **Arabic Statelessness course** in Sanremo, Italy. The training brought together 27 Government officials from countries across the Middle East and North Africa. Participants benefited from interactive sessions on the causes and impact of statelessness, the international and regional legal framework, as well as good practices to address situations of statelessness.

On 27 November, UNHCR organised a training on 'Statelessness and the right to a Nationality' in Senegal aiming at reinforcing the capacity of **African Portuguese-speaking practitioners** from Governments and civil society organizations. The training gathered participants from Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Angola and ECOWAS, as well as trainers from Brazil. The workshop, organized for the first time entirely in Portuguese, was an opportunity to share good practices on different regional initiatives to eradicate statelessness in Africa and in the Americas.



“Nowhere people” photo exhibition showing photos of stateless persons at the Auditorium della Musica in Rome, Italy.  
© Greg Constantine

## Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In September, the Government of **Lebanon** announced **simplified birth and marriage registration procedures** for Syrian nationals and Palestinian refugees from Syria. With this change, valid legal residency of the parents will no longer be required for birth registration. Also, only one spouse (instead of two) will be required to present a valid legal residency or entry card to register a marriage.

With respect to **Action 1 (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness)**, the Government of **Niger** officially adopted a **National Action Plan** to end statelessness during a validation workshop on 27 October.

From October to November, UNHCR’s partner in **Iraq**, the NGO Mercy Hands, assisted in the issuance of 313 Nationality Certificates (*Jinsiyeh*), Civil IDs (*Hawiyeh*) and other legal documents through representation of stateless people in local courts, mainly benefiting Faili Kurds in Diyala and Bedouns in Basrah.

In line with **Action 6 (Grant Protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization)** **Brazil** issued Decree **N° 9.199** on 21 November. In the chapter on statelessness, the decree provides for a **statelessness determination procedure (SDP)** and the conditions for **facilitated naturalization** for stateless persons. A recognized stateless individual can acquire Brazilian nationality after 2 years living in the country.

The decree also guarantees economic and social rights for stateless persons as well as other rights such as family reunification and protection for applicants not recognized as stateless from return to places where their lives might be in danger.

Also with respect to Action 6, **Uruguay** introduced a new bill on the protection of stateless persons that includes the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure and conditions for facilitated naturalization.

In **Turkmenistan**, a working group to coordinate efforts towards the adoption of a statelessness determination procedure was created by the State Migration Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two meetings were held to discuss international standards and practices as well as the practical example of an SDP in Moldova. The group intends to draft a procedure in 2018.

With regard to **Action 7 (Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness)**, a **biometric registration** exercise in the Sayam Forage refugee camp was completed with over 11,000 refugees registered and more than 3,600 provided with refugee identification cards in the **Diffa** region, in **Niger**. The biometric registration exercise is currently taking place in other sites hosting refugees and internally displaced people in the region, where up to 90% of the refugee



World champion slam poet, Emi Mahmoud, performs at the event to commemorate the 3rd anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.  
© UNHCR / Angela Barrau

population lacks documentation establishing their identity or nationality, leaving many at potential risk of statelessness.

On 15 November, UNHCR launched a [Good Practices Paper on Ensuring Birth Registration for the Prevention of Statelessness](#). This paper is the sixth in UNHCR's Good Practices series on statelessness, and provides examples from countries as diverse as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan and Thailand.

On 14-16 November 2017, the **Philippine and Indonesian Governments**, with the support of UNHCR, issued more than 300 birth certificates to persons of Indonesian descent in Davao Occidental, Southern Philippines.

## Campaign Publicity

The **third anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign** was commemorated on 3 November at the Rijksmuseum in **Amsterdam**. The event featured remarks by Carol Batchelor, Director of UNHCR's Division of International Protection, Mark Lattimer, Executive Director of Minority Rights Group International, and Jirair Chichian, a formerly stateless person from Georgia. The US-based Sudanese slam poet, **Ms. Emi Mahmoud**, performed at the event and an exhibition by Anoeke Steketee called ['Document](#)

On **Action 8 (Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it)**, a Kenyan court ruled in favor of the stateless Galjeel minority, which brought a case against the Government of Kenya in 2011 to contest the government's refusal to issue them national identity cards. On 17 October, following a number of *amicus* briefs introduced by human rights defenders, the Mombasa High Court instructed the Galjeel to re-apply for Kenyan national ID cards and ordered the government to consider the applications in accordance with Kenyan laws on nationality.

In line with **Action 9 (Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions)**, the Chamber of Deputies in **Chile** has unanimously approved accession to both statelessness conventions. The bill has been referred to the Senate in one of the final steps towards accession.

[Nederland: Staatloos \(Stateless\)](#)' was on display at the museum.

During the anniversary event UNHCR launched the report ["This is our home": Stateless minorities and their search for Citizenship](#). The report is based on consultations undertaken in 2017 with members of minority groups who are stateless, formerly stateless or at risk of statelessness, including the Karana of



Participants looking at Shona photographs during the event to mark the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign in Nairobi, Kenya. Mr. Ncube (right) arrived in Kenya in 1961 and remains stateless.  
© UNHCR / Nathan Siegel

Madagascar, the Roma and other ethnic minorities of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the Pemba and the Makonde of Kenya. The report highlights that more than 75% of the world’s known populations belong to minority groups and sets out key findings on the impact of statelessness affecting these groups under the themes of discrimination, lack of documentation, poverty and fear.

Many other events also took place around the globe to commemorate the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign, including the following:

On 8 November, the Malawian High Commission in **Pretoria, South Africa**, Lawyers for Human Rights and UNHCR co-hosted an event to mark the anniversary that featured speeches by the Malawian High Commissioner, UNHCR and a stateless person. There was also a photo exhibition of portraits of stateless individuals.

In **Kazakhstan**, two activities were organized. On 7 November, members of the diplomatic corps and international organizations took part in a briefing on global efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness. Guests heard testimony from a stateless person and an individual who recently acquired Kazakh citizenship. On 14 November, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Civil Society Network on Statelessness in Central Asia and

the International Relations Department of the Al-Farabi University, organized a [lecture](#) for students to learn about and discuss statelessness in the region.

In **Tajikistan**, statelessness related content was broadcast on national radio and TV stations as well as on giant screens in downtown Dushanbe in early November to call attention to the issue and the #IBelong Campaign.

TV and radio programs dedicated to the anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign were broadcast in **Senegal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso**, bringing together a number of UNHCR supporters like Magnific, Cheikh Lo, Bideew Bou Bess, Ibrahim Ahmed, Pam Luster, Kajeem and eShun. In Ouagadougou, UNHCR also participated at the “Salon du Droit” - a forum to discuss law, justice and democracy – to raise awareness about statelessness and provide legal aid. In **Guinea**, the government organized an event to officially launch the National Action Plan and a month-long TV slot commemorated the date.

In **Guinea Bissau**, the projection of documentaries and performance by Bissau-Guinean musician Binham Quimor marked the anniversary.

In **Kenya**, local and national media outlets widely covered stories of **Pemba** and **Shona** stateless minorities

throughout November. A commemorative event was organized in Nairobi and included a panel discussion, testimonies from stateless persons, and a photo exhibition on the Shona and Pemba. Stateless minority representatives from these communities attended the event along with government officials, civil society organizations and foreign diplomats.

In the capitals of the **Democratic Republic of Congo** and the **Republic of Congo**, awareness-raising workshops took place and resulted in draft communication strategies on statelessness.

In **Sudan**, a high-level workshop on children and statelessness was organized by the Ribat University that gathered Ministerial representatives, police officials, civil society organizations and the media. The Universities of Africa International and Kararri organized lectures on statelessness, as well as films and theatre plays. In addition, the General Directorate of Civil Registry organized documentation campaigns in Khartoum state targeting some 500 children.

In **Chad**, an event marking the anniversary took place on 3 November and was used as an opportunity to invite Chadian authorities and the public to sign the #IBelong Campaign's Open Letter.

In the **Americas**, government representatives commemorated the date during the Brazil Plan of Action evaluation meeting on statelessness in Buenos Aires, Argentina. UNHCR's report "This is Our Home" was launched and guests listened to testimony from Maha Mamo – a stateless refugee living in Brazil and a vocal spokesperson about statelessness. Ms. Mamo was interviewed [live](#) during the occasion and her story was recently featured in a [video](#) by a global media outlet reaching millions of views.

In Europe, UNHCR organized an [event](#) to launch the "This is Our Home" report in Skopje, in **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**. As one of the countries featured in the report, the event attracted high-level attendees from key Ministries, international organizations, civil society organizations and stateless individuals. Extensive media coverage and a [social media](#) statement by a key government official have been positive outcomes of the event. UNHCR also sponsored the photo exhibition "Nowhere People" by Greg Constantine in the [United Kingdom](#) and [Italy](#) to mark the anniversary.

## Upcoming Events

The new Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness at the University of Melbourne in Australia is setting up a PhD scholarship to commence next year. Applications close on 19 February 2018. Apply [here](#).

In February 2018, a regional meeting to present the main conclusions and recommendations of the consultations on the evaluation of the Brazil Plan of Action will take place in Brasilia, Brazil.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues will [focus on statelessness](#) in his March 2018 Report to the Human Rights Council.

## Campaign Resources

Want to support the Campaign? Take a look at our [#IBelong website](#) and post a digital banner on your website, mobilize your social media contacts by sharing one of our posts, download and post our Twitter cards or embed a short video that explains statelessness. Videos, photo essays and web stories can be found on our [#IBelong stories page](#). Legal resources are available on [Refworld](#).

## Learn More About Statelessness

Learning about statelessness is fun and easy. Take advantage of our [self-study module](#) from the comfort of your armchair!



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