

# The Campaign to End Statelessness

July – September 2019 Update

# #IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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## High-Level Segment on Statelessness

On 7 October, the [High-Level Segment on Statelessness](#) was convened as part of UNHCR's annual Executive Committee meeting. The event was organized at the midway mark of the ten-year #IBelong Campaign and was therefore an opportunity for States to both showcase their achievements so far while also making pledges for the remainder of the Campaign. Over 350 commitments were submitted by governments, civil society and international and regional organizations. Among them are over 250 commitments made by over 65 States. These include pledges to introduce safeguards in nationality laws to prevent statelessness; end gender discrimination in nationality laws; provide protection to stateless persons; facilitate naturalization of stateless people; ensure birth registration of particular groups that are at risk of statelessness; accede to or ratify the UN statelessness conventions; and enhance or initiate data collection on stateless populations.



UN High-Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi and UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed at the high-level panel on statelessness during UNHCR's Executive Committee meeting. © UNHCR



UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett and statelessness activist Maha Mamo at a press conference after the opening of UNHCR's Executive Committee meeting in which they participated. © UNHCR/Pierre Albouy

The High-Level Segment on Statelessness opened with UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett interviewing statelessness activist Maha Mamo about her 30-year-effort to obtain citizenship. This was followed by a high-level panel including UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Lamberto Zannier, and British TV journalist and presenter Anita Rani. The forum aimed to humanize the problem of statelessness, to spur action, and to show that the #IBelong Campaign is not only about changing laws on paper but about changing lives and offering hope to stateless people.

At a Treaty Event following the panel, Angola and Colombia became the two latest States to join the UN statelessness conventions, formally depositing instruments of accession and ratification to the treaties during the event itself. Angola acceded to both the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Colombia, already a State party to the 1961 Convention, acceded to the 1954 Convention. This brings the total number of States party to the Conventions to 93 for the 1954 Convention and 74 for the 1961 Convention.

A civil society side-event showcased efforts to end statelessness from a different perspective and provided an opportunity to take stock of significant achievements, identify steps States are encouraged to take, discuss the role of civil society in mobilizing action and identify key obstacles to ensuring nationality rights for all. Marketplace stalls highlighted work by activists and experts from different geographic regions on a variety of thematic issues.

Statelessness also took centre stage at the [Nansen Award ceremony](#) where Azizbek Ahurov, a lawyer from Kyrgyzstan, received UNHCR's 2019 Nansen Award for his work to end statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic. Ashurov was praised for his outstanding 16-year commitment to ending statelessness in Kyrgyzstan, ensuring that those left stateless by the break-up of the former Soviet Union finally have citizenship. Ashurov runs Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders, an organization which teamed up with the Kyrgyz Government to identify all stateless persons on the territory and provide legal support to resolve their situation as of July 2019.





Adriana Mejía Hernández (far right), Vice-Minister of Multilateral Affairs of Colombia, is recognised by UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, and UN Office of Legal Affairs representative Arancha Hinojal, for Colombia's accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. © UNHCR/Jean Marc Ferré

## Interview with the High Commissioner

*UNHCR convened a High-Level Segment on Statelessness to mark the mid-point of the #IBelong Campaign and to give renewed impetus to the Campaign – how do you evaluate the results of the event?*

I'm very pleased and impressed by the total number of pledges – over 350 confirmed in writing, all of which will feed into the Global Forum on Refugees. It's particularly notable that over 65 States made pledges to address statelessness, showing the widespread strong political will and commitment to the goal of the #IBelong Campaign to eradicate statelessness.

Some of the pledges, such as those by Kenya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Turkmenistan are very significant, as each of these States committed to completely resolving all cases of statelessness on their territories, in almost all cases before the end of

the #IBelong Campaign in 2024. Eswatini and Liberia have committed to removing gender discrimination from their nationality laws so that mothers can confer their nationality to their children on the same basis as fathers. Other States - Central African Republic, Eswatini and Nigeria - made pledges relating to the removal of spousal-related gender discrimination. Over 20 States have pledged to establish dedicated statelessness determination procedures, which will allow stateless people to have a formal legal status and enjoy the rights to which they are entitled until they acquire a nationality. And more than 30 States having committed to collect better qualitative and quantitative data on stateless persons within the next 5 years – measures which will dramatically improve the information we have on stateless people. More than 100 more pledges were made by 11 international and regional organizations and 22 civil society organizations.

Apart from these important commitments, the High-Level Segment also gave an important opportunity to States to talk about some of the successes they have already secured in addressing

statelessness. There were inspiring examples of States working to identify stateless people, undertaking relevant law reforms to prevent and reduce statelessness and granting nationality to those in situations of protracted situations of statelessness..

The High-Level Segment also generated important visibility for this relatively little-known issue, which affects the lives of so many and in fact, renders them invisible. I was encouraged by the high level of media attention that the event and the Nansen Award Event attracted. Cate Blanchett's participation, and that of other high-profile individuals, as well as Maha Mamo, a formerly stateless person, were particularly valuable. As recently as five years ago, public awareness of statelessness and the harm it causes was still negligible. That is changing, and today the interest in ending statelessness entirely has never been higher. At the same time, we need to keep in mind that success is far from assured: we are observing damaging forms of nationalism and rejection of diversity which risk putting progress into reverse. This is why a redoubling of efforts has become crucially needed. For those States that have not made pledges, I hope that the event has inspired them to take action.

*We have five years left to bring an end to statelessness, how will UNHCR move forward with the #IBelong Campaign to achieve this goal by 2024?*

The many concrete and time-bound pledges that States made at the High-Level Segment will propel the second half of the #IBelong Campaign. The pledges will feed into the outcome document of the Global Refugee Forum and will be tracked and followed up through the mechanisms associated with it. UNHCR has a strong commitment over the next five years to support the work of States in implementing them. Each of our Regional Bureaux will now conduct an analysis of the pledges made in the respective regions, so it is clear what needs to be done to support the implementation of these pledges. While I am convinced that these new commitments will give strong impetus to the Campaign, an initial assessment tells us that even more needs to be done in order to meet its ambitious goals. And we should not limit our efforts to implementation of these pledges; we need to go even further.

## Mobilizing governments and civil society

Preparatory meetings ahead of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness were organized in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and in Southern Africa. On 4 July the Kingdom of Morocco hosted a **preparatory meeting for the MENA region** which was attended by 27 government officials from 11 countries, as well as representatives from the League of Arab States, the African Union, and UNHCR. The meeting served to encourage a coordinated regional approach and dialogue on best practices in addressing statelessness. It also created an opportunity for States to consider country-level achievements and pledges to be showcased at the High-Level Segment. On 30 August, UNHCR convened a **preparatory meeting for Southern Africa** in Pretoria, South Africa. The event brought

together government focal points on statelessness from ten States who discussed pledges and achievements to be presented at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

To move towards a coordinated national approach in addressing statelessness, a number of States developed **National Action Plans to End Statelessness**. On 10 September, the Council of Ministers of **Niger** adopted the National Action Plan to Eradicate Statelessness. From 21 to 25 October, the Government of **Eswatini** adopted a National Action Plan and started its implementation with a round of training sessions with members of Parliament and traditional leaders. On 19 September, a National Action plan was adopted by the **Central African Republic** after a National Committee for



the elimination of statelessness was established in August. In September, multi-stakeholder meetings took place in **Madagascar** and **Zambia** to develop National Action Plans. Both draft action plans are pending endorsement by the respective Cabinets.

A number of **statelessness courses** were organized to strengthen awareness of international standards among government officials and other stakeholders, while also providing a platform for participants to share experiences and explore solutions. From 8 to 12 July, the **University of Cape Town**, in partnership with UNHCR, organized its first course on nationality and statelessness for government actors and civil society practitioners. The course was attended by 38 participants from 11 countries in Southern Africa and two countries in West Africa. From 30 July to 3 August, the annual **Statelessness Summer Course** of the **Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion** took place at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. The course drew participants from all over the world, including government officials, NGO representatives

and UNHCR staff. On 15 and 16 August, the **8th Regional Course on Statelessness** was held in San José, Costa Rica, which was attended by 58 government officials from 26 different entities and two participants from civil society.

On 18 July, UNHCR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held a side-event at the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development in New York on **“Ending Statelessness: The Critical Role of Law Reform”**. The event was attended by Parliamentarians from all over the world. Presentations were made by Ágnes Vadai, Member of Parliament from Hungary and President of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law; Maha Mamo, statelessness activist; Catherine Harrington, Campaign Manager of the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights; and Gideon Ochanda, Member of Parliament from Kenya and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Caucus on Sustainable Development and Business of Kenya.



Participants at the first course on nationality and statelessness of the University of Cape Town. © UNHCR

On 10 and 11 September, UNHCR and the Government of Mali convened the **Regional Dialogue on Protection and Solutions in relation to Forced Displacement in the Sahel**, in Bamako, Mali. Co-chaired by the Malian Minister of Solidarity and UNHCR Director for West and Central Africa, the meeting was attended by officials and NGO representatives from Burkina-Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger. The UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, attended as a special guest. Participants agreed to strengthen access to civil registration services in war-affected areas in the Sahel region, including by building the capacity of relevant actors and using information technologies to enhance access.

On 10 September, UNHCR and the **UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Democracy at the Abome-Calavi University in Benin signed a Memorandum of Understanding** paving the way for collaboration on statelessness. The University and UNHCR will work towards introducing a course on statelessness into the formal curriculum.

In July, UNHCR and the Chadian National School of Administration organized its **first conference on statelessness** in N'Djamena. The conference brought together over 150 participants, including

academics, government officials and representatives of UN agencies, to discuss challenges related to statelessness in Chad and avenues to address them.

On 9 September, UNHCR held **roundtable discussions with the faculties of law** from the Great Zimbabwe University, Midlands State University, University of Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University in an effort to strengthen partnership with academia. The meeting resulted in an agreement to expand areas of collaboration with respect to research on statelessness, and to organize an annual National Moot Court Competition as well as a Conference on statelessness, which will first be held in November this year.

On 2 July, several recognized experts on statelessness adopted the "**Expert Statement on the Prevention and Eradication of Statelessness in the Americas**" on the margins of the World Conference on Statelessness organized by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion. The declaration highlights the risk of statelessness as a result of large-scale displacement in the region, mainly from Venezuela. The declaration also includes a series of recommendations to address the situation.



Participants at the Regional Workshop on Registration, Statelessness and Refugee Status Determination in Santiago, Chile. © UNHCR



From 9 to 11 September, the **XVI Encounter of the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, Identity and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV)** was held in Santiago, Chile. This annual meeting brings together civil registry institutions to exchange good practices in the registration and identification of people. The Executive Committee of CLARCIEV adopted a declaration recognizing statelessness as a violation of the right to a nationality, while also agreeing to develop projects to ensure birth registration, particularly in the context of mixed flows, and develop regional guidelines to facilitate late birth registration procedures.

From 12 to 15 September, UNHCR, in coordination with the Universal Civil Identity Program in the Americas (PUICA) of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Chilean Civil Registry and Identification Service, organized a **Regional Workshop on Registration, Statelessness and Refugee Status Determination** in the framework of the CLARCIEV meeting. The training targeted civil registry offices and the National Commission for Refugees of Latin America and the Caribbean in an effort to strengthen national registration services and identity management as a means to address and prevent statelessness.

On 18 and 19 September, UNHCR held an **interinstitutional workshop on statelessness identification and protection** with the Government of Costa Rica. 25 Chilean Government officials from different ministries discussed solutions to ensure that stateless persons have access to public programs and are taken into account in the development of public policies. Participants also identified ways to strengthen coordination with respect to the identification and referral of cases among the institutions.



Participants at the academic roundtable on statelessness organized by UNHCR and the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness in Bangkok. © UNHCR

On 26 September, UNHCR and LexisNexis, a global content provider for legal professionals, co-hosted a **Rule of Law roundtable discussion on statelessness** in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The event was part of LexisNexis' awareness campaign on statelessness titled "Now/Here I Belong". The roundtable participants, which included lawyers and staff from NGOs, discussed challenges, opportunities and good practices in conducting litigation on statelessness.

On 25 and 26 September, UNHCR and the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness co-sponsored an **academic roundtable to assess the state of academic involvement in statelessness-related research and education** in Southeast Asia. The event was hosted by the Social Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok and attended by 19 academics whose work focuses on statelessness.



As Kholnazar's (15) and Numon's (12) mother is stateless, both children did not get birth certificates in Tajikistan and thus could not get school certificates. After resolving their stateless situation, Kholnazar and Numon will be able to graduate from secondary school and to continue their studies. © UNHCR/Didor Sadulloev

On 31 July, the **Central Asian Network on Statelessness** conducted its fourth annual meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan to review achievements and challenges related to the reduction and prevention of statelessness in Central Asia at the mid-point of the #IBelong Campaign. Some 30 members from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan agreed to strengthen regional efforts to end statelessness and to make pledges in this regard at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

On 5 and 6 September, UNHCR and the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Kazakhstan, in close coordination with UNICEF and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, organized the **2nd Central Asian Regional Conference on Birth Registration and Prevention of Statelessness** in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. Over 100 delegates from the five Central Asian countries explored concrete efforts to ensure universal birth registration and discussed how the upcoming round of national population censuses may be used in mapping stateless populations.

From 4 to 8 July, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly during its 28<sup>th</sup> annual session adopted the **Luxembourg Declaration and Resolutions**, which called on OSCE participating States to support and protect stateless children within their borders and to take all possible measures to ensure that all stateless children can benefit from the right to citizenship, in accordance with international law.

On 6 September, upon the invitation of Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, UNHCR participated in a meeting of the **European Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid & Food Aid (COHAFA)** in Brussels, Belgium. UNHCR's Statelessness Section Chief updated the EU Member States on the key global achievements and challenges on statelessness, and provided information on the #IBelong Campaign and the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.



## Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with **Action 1, Resolve existing major situations of statelessness**, and **Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it**, UNHCR continues to support local NGO DHRRA (Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas) Malaysia to assist stateless persons to apply for citizenship and documentation. As of 1 September, this has resulted in 12,396 applications being submitted to the National Registration Department and 3,534 persons acquiring Malaysian nationality.

With regard to **Action 2, Ensure that no child is born stateless**, on 5 August the President of Colombia announced the adoption of a temporary measure to grant Colombian nationality by birth to children born in the territory to Venezuelan parents. The measure is expected to benefit over 20,000 newborns in Colombia.

Also in line with **Action 2**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Justice of Côte d'Ivoire continued to support activities to provide nationality certificates to stateless foundlings. Since the beginning of the year, judicial decisions in eight jurisdictions across the country have led to over 100 foundlings obtaining Ivorian nationality. This shift in legal thinking can be attributed to a series of trainings of magistrates that were conducted in May and in July this year to sensitize judges on the application of the UN statelessness conventions including with respect to the provision on foundlings.

With respect to **Action 6, Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization**, on 17 July, the Argentine Parliament adopted a law on the identification and protection of stateless persons that establishes a Statelessness Determination Procedure (SDP) and a protection framework for stateless persons. The law also provides for facilitated naturalization of stateless persons.



On 17 July, The Argentine Parliament adopted a law on the identification and protection of stateless persons. © UNHCR



Yan (8) was separated from his parents in Kazakhstan, because he did not have a birth certificate to prove his identity and family ties. Now he was issued a birth certificate and can reunite with his family. © UNHCR/Timur Epov

Also on **Action 6**, on 20 August, Portugal adopted a [National Plan for the Implementation of the Global Compact on Migration](#). The National Plan contains a commitment to ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity, a protected status, and proper documentation.

In line with both **Action 6** and **Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness**, on 3 July, UNHCR and the Ministry of Justice of Mali signed a renewed partnership agreement that will provide for the naturalization of 1,200 refugees of Mauritanian origin who have opted for naturalization and the issuance of birth certificates for 300 indigenous people in the Kayes region.

Also on **Action 6**, on 23 April, amendments introduced to the [Law on Foreigners in the Republic](#) of Bulgaria allow the possibility of issuing a continuous residence permit to recognized stateless persons, which will enable their legal stay. The amendments entered into force in October 2019.

With respect to **Action 7**, UNHCR provided support to several governments in issuing birth certificates to populations at risk of statelessness. In Burkina Faso, 27,960 birth certificates were issued in the central-eastern and central-southern regions to persons at risk of statelessness. The Government of

Chad issued 24,000 birth certificates to children of refugees and refugee-hosting communities at risk of statelessness. In Niger, UNHCR, in collaboration with ICAHD-INTERNATIONAL and the NGO Secours des Oubliés (SDO), organized mobile courts for adults and children in migratory situations who have no or damaged birth certificates. A total of 2,337 birth certificates were issued to people in Tillabéri, Niamey, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Zinder and Diffa regions. Finally, in Sudan, birth registration campaigns were held in five States among refugees, IDPs and host communities, focusing on both new-born and late birth registration. During the campaigns a total of 1,350 birth certificates were issued.

Also with respect to **Action 7**, a new Child Rights Law was adopted in Myanmar on 27 July. The law provides for universal and free birth registration for all children born in Myanmar without discrimination.

Finally, with respect to **Action 7**, in June the lower chamber of the Parliament of Kazakhstan adopted amendments to the Code on Marriage and Family to ensure that all children born in Kazakhstan are registered at birth regardless of the legal status of their parents. The draft law will be considered by the Senate of the Parliament later this year.



In line with **Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it**, from June to August, UNHCR provided support to the Government of Burkina Faso in issuing 5,000 national identity cards to IDPs from Barsalgho and Foubé in the central-northern region. The issuance of identity documents reduces the risk of statelessness for IDPs, facilitates their freedom of movement and avoids arrest and detention.

Also In line with **Action 8**, the Department of the Registrar General of Zimbabwe, with operational support from UNHCR, launched a mobile registration exercise for the issuance and replacement of nationality and civil status documentation to the populations affected by the Tropical Cyclone Idai in the Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts in Manicaland Province. From 9 to 22 September, a total of 8,725 nationality and civil status documents had been issued.

Finally, on **Action 10, Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations**, in Niger, UNHCR, ICAHD-INTERNATIONAL and Secours des Oubliés (SDO) identified 2,014 persons at risk of statelessness in Niger through a census that was conducted between June and August. The mobile court hearings identified 533 refugee children, 717 internally displaced children and 280 returnees without documents or with damaged documents.

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## Media impact of the Campaign

The High-Level Segment on Statelessness was widely covered by media. Articles [described Cate Blanchett's plea to accelerate efforts to address statelessness](#). [Reuters](#) dedicated an article to the pledge made by Kenya to resolve statelessness on its territory by 2024, and particularly to recognize members of the Shona community as nationals. Media attention also went to the winner of the Nansen Award, Azizbek Ashurov, highlighting his efforts to end statelessness in Kyrgyzstan. Coverage was featured by a number of media outlets, including [The Telegraph](#) and [Reuters](#).

[Three TV talk shows](#) were broadcast in Madagascar in August and September to raise awareness on statelessness. The talk shows were initiated by Focus Development and involved high level personalities from Madagascar.

## Upcoming events

### From 9 to 11 December, in Bangkok, Thailand

UNHCR is organizing a first meeting of national technical experts on improving statistics on stateless persons. The purpose of the meeting is to develop guidance that can support statistics production in the area of stateless persons, improve reporting and build national capacity.

### From 9 to 12 December, in Pretoria, South Africa

In partnership with the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, UNHCR and Lawyers for Human Rights South Africa, UNICEF will organize an “Advanced intensive training program on childhood statelessness and the child’s right to a nationality” under the umbrella of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition to End Childhood Statelessness. The course is designed to help actors already engaged in addressing statelessness to deepen their understanding of childhood statelessness and strategies to promote a child-rights-centred approach to the issue, and it will also help existing child rights actors strengthen their capacity to engage on this issue.

### From 9 to 13 December, in Yaoundé, Cameroon

UNHCR and the Catholic University of Central Africa will organize a summer course in French on statelessness. The objective of the course is to help actors to deepen their understanding of nationality law and statelessness.

### From 3 to 7 February, in Melbourne, Australia

The Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness will offer its second [Statelessness Intensive Course](#) to provide participants with the skills and practical tools to understand and address the problem of statelessness.

### From 8 to 14 June, in Sanremo, Italy

The 9th English Course on Statelessness will take place at the International Institute for Humanitarian Law in Sanremo. The course is co-organized by UNHCR and focuses on government representatives looking into addressing statelessness and NGOs working with stateless people.

## 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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