The Campaign to End Statelessness

December 2015 Update

#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

In cooperation with
UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON.

Mobilizing governments and civil society

Almost 100 Members of Parliament from 39 countries attended the "**Conference on Ensuring Everyone's Right to a Nationality: The Role of Parliaments in Ending and Preventing Statelessness**," co-organized by the Parliament of South Africa, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNHCR on 26-27 November in Cape Town. The Parliamentarians adopted an outcome document featuring a **7 point Plan of Action** that includes: reviewing national legislation to ensure compliance with international standards to prevent and reduce statelessness; undertaking legislative reform to remove any discrimination from nationality laws; and formation of a group of parliamentary champions of UNHCR's **#IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024**.

On 4 December, the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union adopted the first **EU Council Conclusions on Statelessness**. The Conclusions invite the European Commission to launch exchanges of good practices among Member States; encourage the active coordination of national statelessness contact points; and welcome the #IBelong Campaign. Luxembourg, as the current president of the Council of the EU, played a leadership role in achieving this outcome.

On 30 October, delegations from 22 Permanent Missions to the United Nations in Geneva came together to launch the "**Friends of the Campaign to End Statelessness**" at a meeting hosted by the United States Mission in Geneva and co-chaired by AHC/P Volker Turk. This Geneva-based group should help boost support for the #IBelong Campaign, including through more coordinated diplomatic advocacy.

A **Consultative Conference on Citizenship and Statelessness in West Africa** took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 28-30 September. Participants, including government representatives, civil society, academia and the media, presented **progress to date** in relation to this year's groundbreaking **Abidjan Declaration on the Eradication of Statelessness**. On 20 November, West African States, with the support of UNHCR, also successfully advocated for the inclusion of **statelessness issues in the African Union Humanitarian Policy Framework** to be submitted to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

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Delegates listen attentively during a session at the IPU – UNHCR conference in Cape Town.

From 30 November to 2 December in Johannesburg, South Africa, Senior Government Officials from Southern African Development Community (SADC) Member States gathered for a workshop jointly organized by International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Save the Children and UNHCR. Among the agenda items were the identification of **statelessness activities to be included in a SADC roadmap** addressing mixed and irregular migration in the region.

On 7-8 December a **regional statelessness workshop in Stockholm** provided a platform for sharing good practices within Northern Europe and beyond the region. The workshop focused on two regional priorities: ensuring that no child is born stateless and the identification and protection of stateless persons.

Avenues for the formation of a Central Asia Civil Society Network on Statelessness were explored during the **first Central Asia Regional Civil Society Retreat** during 4-5 November 2015 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The **Core Group of the Civil Society Network to End Statelessness in the Asia Pacific Region** met in Bangkok on 21-22 November to develop draft terms of reference for the new network.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

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From the ethnic Akha tribe, Thida Arngee was stateless until she obtained Thai nationality.

In line with **Action 1 of the Global Action Plan (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness**), UNHCR welcomes the announcement by the Royal Thai Government that **more than 18,000 people have been granted nationality in Thailand** in the last three years. Many stateless people and those at risk of statelessness in Thailand belong to hill tribes living in remote or border areas and have limited access to information about their rights and nationality procedures. Thousands of these persons have been assisted by UNHCR and partners to have their Thai nationality confirmed.

Also in relation to **Action 1**, on 23 November, UNHCR's office in Kyrgyzstan organized the **Sixth High Level Steering Meeting on Prevention and Eradication of Statelessness**, where participants took stock of progress to eradicate statelessness and updated the Kyrgyz National Action Plan on the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR and the Government have agreed to develop an operational work plan to address the situation of more than 15,000 individuals who fall under UNHCR's statelessness mandate, including through an amnesty agreement.

On 2-3 November, a workshop with Members of the Madagascan National Assembly, jointly organized by Focus Development, the Equal Rights Trust, the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, OHCHR and UNHCR, confirmed the **commitment by Madagascan Members of Parliament to eliminate gender discrimination** in their future Nationality Act, which is currently being developed. This would be consistent with **Action 3 of the Global Action Plan (Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws)**.

Progress has also been made in relation to **Action 9 of the Global Action Plan (Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions) with Italy's accession** to the 1961 **Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness** on 1 December. This brings the 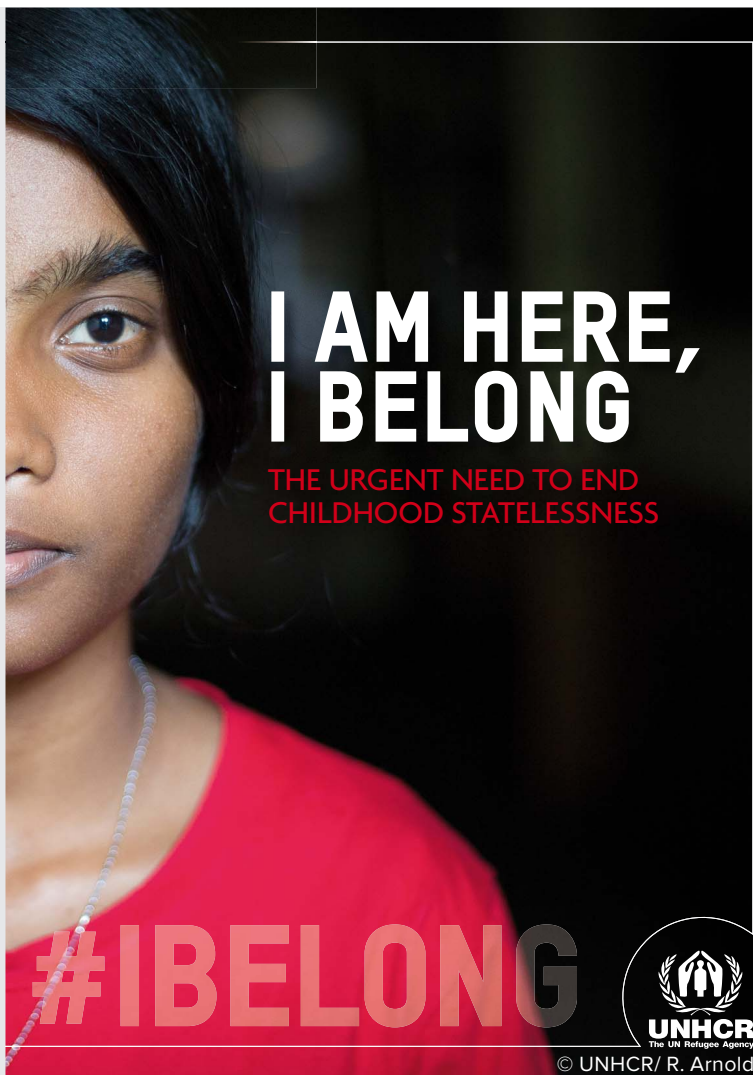total tally of States party to the 1961 Convention to 65, and makes Italy the 4th State to accede to this Convention since the launch of the #IBelong Campaign.

In line with Action 10 of the Global Action Plan (Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations), a **UNHCR mapping study on statelessness in Norway** was launched on 4 November. Along with the study, a proposed National Action Plan was presented to the relevant government authorities. Also in line with Action 10, **UNHCR's Award for Best Research on Statelessness 2015** has been awarded to Kristy Belton, University of Connecticut for the best doctoral thesis; Marie Brokstad Lund-Johansen, University of Oslo for the best graduate research; and Veronica Perozo Alberti, Tilburg University for the best undergraduate research. The researchers examined statelessness in the Dominican Republic, Kuwait, and the relationship between statelessness and migration, respectively.

The #IBelong Campaign celebrates its first year anniversary

The first anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign was commemorated in New York in November, where the **High Commissioner, Antonió Guterres,** launched UNHCR's new report: **I am Here, I Belong: the Urgent Need to End Childhood Statelessness**, featuring the testimonies of stateless children and youth consulted by UNHCR in July and August 2015. One of the stateless youth featured in the report – **Jirair from Georgia** - spoke alongside the High Commissioner about the impact that statelessness has had on his life. Please read his moving **speech**.

On 13 November, the Director of the Division of International Protection, Carol Batchelor, hosted an event in UNHCR's main atrium highlighting the achievements of the Campaign to date and featuring a presentation by photographer Greg Constantine about his new book, "Nowhere People."

I AM HERE, I BELONG
THE URGENT NEED TO END CHILDHOOD STATELESSNESS

#IBELONG

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Tha chaa, 18, Malaysia.

Graffiti art and roller skaters promoting the #IBelong Campaign in Senegal.

Media impact of the Campaign

Colourful events around the world marked the **first anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign:**

In **Times Square, New York**, and at the **main train station in Oslo, Norway**, pedestrians and commuters were surprised to see big screen images by photographer Greg Constantine of stateless children.

In **Armenia**, VivaCell-MTS, a major communication service provider, sent the following **mass text message** to their customers "UNHCR: One child without nationality is too many. Join UNHCR's campaign against statelessness. Visit ibelong.unhcr.org."

In **Dakar**, roller skaters rallied on the streets to spread the message "Engage, everyone has the right to a nationality". Senegalese graffiti artists illustrated the plight of stateless persons on the main wall of the UNHCR Office in Dakar.

UNHCR **Montenegro** organized a panel discussion on statelessness at the University of Montenegro for students to highlight the first anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign. In December this **#IBelong Campaign video** will be screened in the largest cinema in Podgorica before every movie projection.

South Africa celebrated the Campaign's anniversary by opening a photo exhibition in Johannesburg featuring portraits by Daniel Boshoff of stateless people in South Africa. The event was organized jointly with Constitution Hill, the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre, and Lawyers for Human Rights.

In **Nairobi, Kenya**, a special photo exhibition at the National Museum featured images of everyday life of the Makonde, a stateless group still regarded as 'visitors' in Kenya although they have lived in the country for decades.

We're delighted to announce that **more than 81,000 people** have now **signed the Open Letter to End Statelessness** – among the most prominent recent supporters are the **President of Costa Rica, Guillermo Solis, and his entire Cabinet**; Ernesto Samper, President of the Union of South American Nations; Martin Chungon, Secretary General of the Inter Parliamentary Union; and more than 50 MPs who attended the Conference on Statelessness in Cape Town.

Upcoming Events

Statelessness as a root cause of displacement will be among the topics discussed during UNHCR's **High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges: "Understanding and addressing root causes of displacement"** on 16 - 17 December 2015.

Australia will host the second meeting of the group of the **Friends of the Campaign to End Statelessness** in the first quarter of 2015.

We will be looking to build on the **momentum** represented by the creation of the Group of Friends of the Campaign to End Statelessness, the EU Council Conclusions and other regional developments, and the Outcome Document from the IPU-UNHCR event to help support more targeted **achievements in 2016** in different areas covered by the Global Action Plan.

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 **statelessness e-learning course** and **self-study module** from the comfort of your armchair!

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