

**Update on Statelessness  
Standing Committee  
June 2015**

**Louise Aubin, Deputy Director  
Division of International Protection**

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

A **glaring anomaly** in today's world, statelessness dramatically impacts the lives of at least 10 million people around the globe. What makes statelessness and the suffering it inflicts particularly troubling from **moral, legal and development perspectives** is that it can be prevented and resolved with relatively simple measures.

UNHCR's **#IBelong Campaign** to End Statelessness in Ten Years stems from that very belief that **statelessness is entirely solvable**. The launch in November last year signified a turning point for us: the most **visible manifestation of the prioritization** of this area of our mandate. As of 2016, all regions are required to have multi-year operational strategies and all relevant operations will need to have concrete targets to identify and reduce cases of statelessness.

The Global Action Plan that accompanies the Campaign sets out ten Actions which, if implemented to address local realities, can resolve existing situations of statelessness and prevent new cases from emerging. With the first **milestones of the Action Plan only two years away**, we urgently need to capitalize on the early momentum of the Campaign. In coming months we will be reaching out to Member States to bolster partnership in this area, including through the creation of a **Friends of the Campaign Group** based in Geneva.

Of course crucial to our ultimate goal of ending statelessness is the need to **resolve existing situations**. The fact that several States have taken action to enable over **four million stateless people in the past decade to acquire nationality** is testament to this realization. Most recently, States such as Cote

d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, and Malaysia have taken meaningful steps to address protracted statelessness.

The **urgency** of addressing statelessness is particularly evident when taking stock of the **impact it has on children**. You've heard us say before that a child is born stateless every 10 minutes. Well, consider that by the time this meeting is over today, 50 new stateless children will have come into existence.

And so, I would like to focus my remarks on some developments and challenges in the area of childhood statelessness while the CRP Update on Statelessness paper (EC/66/SC/CRP.11) provides a fuller account of progress with respect to the Global Action Plan overall.

The urgency to act is evident: **childhood is swift, yet foundational** to most aspects of our productive adult lives. In the short time during which children are children, the **marginalization** caused by statelessness will have a profound impact on a boy's and girl's experiences and opportunities, including their access to education and sense of inclusion and dignity, potentially tainting self-worth and inhibiting contributions to society for years to come. Statelessness, in the words of the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, is 'the **antithesis of the best interest of the child**'.

Statelessness is often **inherited from generation to generation**, and as such can even impact a child's chances at survival: take the example where stateless mothers do not have access to public health care such as pre-natal services or vaccinations for lack of appropriate documentation.

Several States have taken laudable steps to prevent childhood statelessness. Recent amendments to the Citizenship Act adopted by the **Estonian parliament** will enable children born to stateless parents to acquire citizenship automatically at birth. Another example is the new citizenship law of **Georgia** which ensures that all children born on the territory of Georgia who would otherwise be stateless are granted citizenship.

It is now well known that a contributing factor to childhood statelessness is the lack of **birth registration**. In and of itself, birth registration does not equate to nationality, but as it documents where a person was born and who her parents are, it is often critical to establishing one's nationality.

The risk of statelessness increases dramatically in **situations of conflict** and of forced displacement. Today, half of **Syria's** physical registries are destroyed and in many parts of the country, there are no functioning civil registration services at all. Fathers are absent in some 25% of refugee homes. This, coupled with the fact that only Syrian fathers are permitted to transmit nationality to their children, means that thousands of children are potentially left stateless.

Refugee hosting countries have stepped up efforts to address the situation: in 2014 alone, over 40,000 refugee families in **Lebanon** were counselled by UNHCR and partners on birth registration procedures which have been simplified by the Government in response to new refugee births. **Jordan** launched **mobile birth registration** units for camp-based refugees and issued 2,400 birth certificates to Syrian refugee children in 2014, compared to fewer than 300 the previous year.

There is no doubt, given the critical importance it plays in preventing childhood statelessness, that the inclusion of birth registration for all as a target in the **post-2015 development agenda** will be of vital importance to future generations.

The **global resolve** to end statelessness is nowhere better evidenced than by the inspiring range of collaboration and coalition building taking place.

The **political will of States** is key. As we have heard from the AHC-P, two regions – Latin American and Caribbean States and the Economic Community of West African States – have already committed to ending statelessness. In taking up the presidency of the **European Union**, we welcome Luxemburg's inclusion of statelessness on the EU's agenda. We look to the leadership of other bodies, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the

Organization of the Islamic Conference, who can play an influential role in addressing statelessness.

We are also witnessing several regional **civil society coalitions** actively taking shape: the European Network on Statelessness has emerged as a major actor in Europe, NGOs in the Americas joined to create the Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness last year and most recently civil society groups in Asia and the Pacific have agreed to set up a new and dedicated network to prevent and eradicate statelessness in the region. Coordination between civil society groups in Africa is also increasing.

The measures to address statelessness that have been taken over the past two years all demonstrate one clear truth: where there is a will, there is a way. Unlike so many of the world's pressing problems, solving statelessness is a goal that's within our reach. We look forward to working with you to achieve it.