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**SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE GREAT LAKES  
REGION (CIRGL)**

**Lors de la session du Comité exécutif du Programme du Haut  
Commissaire (Soixante-dixième session)**

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Geneva, Switzerland, October 9, 2019

Your Excellency, Mr. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, high representatives of the agencies of the United Nations system;

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, representatives of States and international organizations;

Ladies and gentlemen, representatives of civil society;

Ladies and gentlemen, CSIs;

Ladies and gentlemen, ~~ladies and gentlemen,~~

*- Mr Chair  
- High Commissioner*

~~Ladies & gentlemen~~  
Distinguished guests in your respective ranks and qualities,

*on behalf of the*

It is both an honour and a real pleasure for me to speak from this rostrum ~~in my capacity as~~ Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, known as ICGLR, to discuss the progress made by our organization in combating statelessness in the region, in line with the global campaign "I BELONG" and the Global Action Plan launched by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2014. With the remaining five years of this campaign, I would ~~also~~ like to share with you the commitments that the ICGLR Secretariat intends to make to contribute to the eradication of statelessness in the Great Lakes region by 2024.

But first of all, I would like ~~first of all~~ to fulfil a duty, in particular that of solemnly thanking the Regional Office for East Africa, the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for its multifaceted support to the process of establishing instruments, tools and bodies to combat statelessness in the 12 Member States of the ICGLR and in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear participants,

As you know, the Great Lakes region of Africa is one of the regions in the world most affected by conflicts of all kinds. It has been through the worst times in decades of its history, which have caused it great grief and loss of life, serious human rights violations, massive population displacements, etc.

In addition, ~~in addition~~ to the conflicts and other parameters that I must mention, it should be noted that the Great Lakes region also suffers from a complex and interrelated set of factors that also continue to promote or increase statelessness or the risk of statelessness in that part of the world. These include: historical population displacements, particularly before independence, conflicts involving cross-border populations, poor governance, weak birth registration administrations and administrative practices related to access to documentation proving nationality.

It is important to note that a stateless person is first and foremost a person without legal existence, a victim of numerous violations of his or her fundamental rights, starting with the right to a nationality and from there, he or she cannot benefit from any protection at both the national and international levels

Aware that statelessness has political, economic, security, social and societal consequences, the Heads of State and Government of the Great Lakes Region have resolved to effectively combat this scourge, including through Commitment 68 of the 2004 Dar Es Salaam Declaration, which states the following: Adopt a common regional approach to the ratification and implementation of the UN conventions on statelessness, harmonize national legislation and standards and provide refugees with identity documents that enable them to access basic services and enjoy their rights".

Thus, to translate this commitment into concrete action, the Foreign Ministers of the 12 ICGLR Member States, with the support of UNHCR, signed a Declaration on 16 October 2017 in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, accompanied by a Regional Action Plan (2017-2019) for the eradication of statelessness in the Great Lakes.

In the context of the implementation of this Declaration and the Regional Action Plan for the Eradication of Statelessness, the ICGLR has made significant progress. These include, in particular,:

- designation of the regional focal point on statelessness by the ICGLR Secretariat;
- appointment of national focal points on statelessness by ICGLR Member States;
- training of government focal points on statelessness;
- training of Ambassadors, National Coordinators of the 12 ICGLR Member States and members of the Bureau of the ICGLR Forum of Parliamentarians on Statelessness;
- organization of a meeting of ministers responsible for nationality matters of the 12 ICGLR Member States that resulted in the validation of a draft ICGLR Action Plan for the Eradication of Statelessness until 2024 and containing an additional strategic objective to ensure access to proof of legal identity, including birth registration and documentation of nationality;
- Advocacy towards Member States that have not yet done so with a view to their accession to the two United Nations conventions on statelessness.

**Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear participants,**

While statelessness may be the cause or consequence of forced population displacement, it can only be noted that in this region, situations of protracted displacement can also cause statelessness. It should be recognized that the search for durable and comprehensive solutions for refugees in this region, in particular those in protracted refugee situations, requires the systematic integration of the prevention and reduction of statelessness into the legal dimension of the proposed solution and even more so in the case of local integration, including access to legal identity documents, including the issuance of birth certificates and a document certifying their nationality. While there are sometimes two or even three generations of refugees born in exile in the Great Lakes region, we can only congratulate the Member States, which are ready and able to facilitate, with the support of their partners, the naturalisation or any other form of acquisition of nationality for refugees as a durable solution and this reduces the risk of statelessness by granting the nationality of the country.

Indeed, our region's efforts are naturally in line with the global momentum driven by UNHCR through the global campaign "IBELONG" and the global action plan 2014-2024 to eradicate statelessness in the world.

Thus, I recognize that an important step has just been taken, but the challenges are immense and that we have an interest in consolidating our region's efforts to combat statelessness. To this end, I solemnly undertake on behalf of the ICGLR Secretariat to:

1. Support and submit for formal adoption the draft consolidated action plan of the ICGLR at the next meeting of the Regional Inter-ministerial Committee on 15 October 2019 in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo;
2. Support research on persons at risk of statelessness and stateless persons in the Great Lakes region to improve the availability of data on statelessness and nationality issues by 2021;
3. Lead the development and implementation of a regional policy and programmatic framework on civil status, in particular birth registration, with a view to ensuring the prevention of statelessness by 2023;
4. Redouble advocacy towards Member States that are not yet parties to international conventions on statelessness and ensure that they accede to these conventions, in accordance with the ICGLR's Consolidated Plan of Action for the Eradication of Statelessness;

I also intend to continue to implement urgent actions, in particular:

1. Support Member States in the development and implementation of their National Action Plans on the Eradication of Statelessness, in accordance with the ICGLR Consolidated Action Plan
2. Continue advocacy for the creation of national task forces on statelessness at the level of each Member State;
3. Provide capacity building and training for civil society members in the region to become involved in statelessness issues;
4. Establish a formal framework for collaboration (MoU) with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, including on specific issues related to statelessness and nationality as well as durable solutions for refugees, based on paragraph 29 of the Final Document of the High Level Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Refugee Affairs held in Uganda from 5-7 March 2019.

**Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear participants,**

This high-level meeting would have been a unique opportunity for the ICGLR to take stock not only of the progress made since the adoption of the Brazzaville Declaration and the Regional Action Plan for the Eradication of Statelessness, but also and above all to ensure that its action was sustainable, particularly for the remaining five years of the Global Campaign to End Statelessness.

I am convinced that by 2024, more than half of the ICGLR Member States will have acceded to and implemented the United Nations conventions on statelessness.

I cannot conclude my remarks without thanking the organizers of this great forum for the opportunity to address this areopagus. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Heads of State and Government of the region who, in their quest for peace and stability for our region, had taken into account this situation of statelessness in the Constitution of our organization, namely the Dar Es Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region.

Thank you very much.

