

## Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

### Regional Preparatory Meeting to the 2019 High-Level Event on Statelessness

4 July 2019, Casablanca, Morocco



#### INTRODUCTION

The MENA Regional Preparatory Meeting to the 2019 High-Level Event on Statelessness (2019 HLS) took place on 4 July 2019 in Casablanca, Morocco. The event was organized by UNHCR and hosted by the Kingdom of Morocco. The meeting was attended by 27 Government officials from eleven countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), in addition to representatives from regional bodies, such as the League of Arab States (LAS) and the African Union (AU). In attendance were also six civil society representatives from five MENA countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco), as well as 18 UNHCR colleagues (HQs, MENA PS, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen and Egypt).

Building on positive developments in MENA, the MENA Regional Preparatory Meeting to the 2019 HLS aimed to encourage a coordinated regional approach and dialogue on best practices. The regional preparatory meeting also created an initial opportunity for States to explore and consider country-level achievements, as well as opportunities and pledges they may wish to showcase during the [2019 HLS](#).

The meeting built on relevant regional initiatives, including:

- **The Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity**, which was adopted during the Ministerial meeting on 28 February 2018 in Tunisia. The Declaration calls for all children to enjoy their right to a legal identity, while also calling for equal nationality rights for women and men in all LAS member States.

- The Regional Expert meeting entitled “Our Children, Our Future: Belonging and Identity” (October 2016, Cairo, Egypt), which resulted in the joint development of an **Arab League Declaration to Strengthen Rights to Legal Identity**: rights to birth registration, nationality and family unity. It also calls for the removal of gender discrimination in nationality laws across the region, in recognition of the linkages between the rights of women and children in MENA.
- The Middle East-North Africa Conference on Good Practices & Regional Opportunities to Advance Women’s Nationality Rights (1-2 October 2017, Cairo, Egypt), which was co-sponsored by UNHCR, LAS, the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, UNICEF and UN Women. The conference culminated in the adoption of an **Outcome Statement Promoting Gender Equality** in the acquisition, change, retention or conferral of nationality.

## SUMMARY OF MEETING

The MENA Regional Preparatory Meeting to the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness was opened by an expert panel discussion, moderated by the Strategic Partnership Advisor, Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kuwait (Former UNHCR Representative). The panel was composed of the UNHCR MENA Director, the UNHCR Special Advisor on Statelessness, League of Arab States’ Undersecretary General – Legal Affairs Sector, and the African Union Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, who recognized and promoted good practices in the region and encouraged pledges for the 2019 HLS.

Government delegates of Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen presented good practices in their respective countries, related to birth registration, gender equal nationality and personal status laws, confirmation and/or acquisition of nationality, CRVS, or other relevant initiatives. A broad range of countries in the region have enacted new and innovative legislative measures to better protect women, children and families, including in relation to their rights to nationality, documentation and family unity. All States in the region have adopted legislative provisions to protect the identity and nationality of foundlings—children of unknown parentage, often orphans or those abandoned at birth. In addition, a range of countries in MENA have introduced additional protection measures. States in MENA are undertaking measures to ensure every child begins life with a birth certificate and a legal identity, with particular attention to the situation of vulnerable children. Notably, significant nationality law reforms were enacted across the region, and other countries have reformed their laws to grant women the right to confer nationality to their children.

The second part of the conference consisted of a working-group session in which States examined achievements, opportunities and pledges against the ten action points of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, ahead of the 2019 HLS. States also examined linkages to the Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Discussions were engaging and participants were eager to learn more about the 2019 HLS, but also to explore how country-specific opportunities could be addressed. Some countries discussed possibilities to conduct nationality verification exercises, while others explored the

provision of national identity documents to refugees abroad, legal reforms to ensure the equal right of men and women to confer nationality to their children, but also naturalization provisions, accession to the statelessness conventions, as well as the mapping statelessness through studies and censuses.

Recognizing sensitivities in the region, States did not present the outcomes of their discussion in plenary but agreed to take the ideas and discussion points back to their respective capitals in preparation for their contribution to the 2019 HLS. All countries recognized importance of the 2019 HLS and beyond.

In his closing remarks, the MENA Director affirmed that he will personally communicate to the UNHCR Representatives to ensure the required follow up at country level directly in the final months leading up to the High-Level Segment, while reassuring participants that UNHCR stands ready at country, regional and global level to provide any technical or other support that may be required.