

**High-level segment on statelessness
at the 70th plenary session of the Executive Committee**

**Statement from members of the Group of Friends of the #IBelong Campaign
to End Statelessness**

7 October 2019

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to deliver this joint statement to the High-level segment on statelessness on behalf of 26 members of the Friends of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, namely Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Finland, Guatemala, Ireland, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United States, Uruguay, and Zambia.

At the outset, the Group of Friends welcomes the organization of a High-level segment on statelessness which allows all of us here to celebrate the mid-point of the #IBelong Campaign by reflecting our achievements, challenges, and making pledges to reaffirm our commitment towards ending statelessness.

Currently, statelessness affects millions of people around the world. Statelessness prevents individuals from their full enjoyment of human rights, including the right to a nationality. A lack of citizenship affects stateless persons' legal protection and voting rights, and often results in reduced access to legal employment, property rights and public services or programs, such as education, health care, and civil registration. Stateless persons may also encounter travel restrictions, social exclusion, and heightened vulnerability to sexual and physical violence, exploitation, trafficking in persons, forcible displacement, and other abuses.

The Group of Friends is pleased to see greater awareness on statelessness issue since the launch of the #IBelong Campaign. We welcome the inclusion of statelessness issues in important milestones such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact on Refugees.

We welcome significant progress made in several areas during the first half of the #IBelong Campaign. There have been 15 States acceding to one or both of the Statelessness Conventions. Many States have taken other concrete steps to prevent or resolve situations of statelessness, especially through the adoption of National Action Plans to tackle statelessness, the establishment or improvement of statelessness determination procedures, the enactment and amendment of relevant national legislations, or the establishment of national focal points, among others.

We also commend the work on ensuring coverage of birth registration for all children born in the territory, granting citizenship to stateless persons, reforming nationality laws to ensure equality between women and men in nationality matters, introducing a safeguard in the nationality laws for children at risk of being born stateless, and improving qualitative and quantitative data on statelessness.

A lot of progress is also shown at the regional level, such as the League of Arab States Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity, the Action Plan of the International Conference on the Great Lake Region on the Eradication of Statelessness, the Abidjan Declaration on the eradication of statelessness, the Brazil Plan of Action, and the European Union Council Conclusions on Statelessness. We appreciate engagement of regional organizations in these endeavors.

We appreciate UNHCR's continued advocacy on statelessness issue and support to Member States on the implementation of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, as well as the collaboration with various partners which helps mainstream statelessness in their respective mandates, such as the Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality with the UNICEF, the work on national censuses with the UNFPA, the monitoring of the human rights of stateless people with the OHCHR, the development of handbooks on good practices in nationality laws with the IPU.

Here in Geneva, a group of countries have gathered and established a Group of Friends of the #IBelong Campaign since 2015. The Group of Friends does not only meet regularly to discuss the statelessness issue and keep track of the Campaign's progress, but also plays an important role in helping the UNHCR advocate the importance of the issue among wider Member States as well as in other relevant fora, such as the Universal Periodic Review.

While we have observed significant progress in addressing statelessness, there remain many things to be done before statelessness is completely eradicated. On the occasion of the High-level segment on statelessness, the Group of Friends would like to reiterate the following key messages:

1. Statelessness is resolvable. We call on States to enact, amend, or reform relevant legislations and policies to permit acquisition of nationality by stateless people. Serious implementation of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness is highly encouraged.
2. Statelessness is also preventable. We call on States to lay out frameworks to prevent the emergence of statelessness in the future, as well as ensure that any new law or policy will not bring about new cases of statelessness.
3. We encourage States to take into account the link that statelessness has with humanitarian, human rights, and development issues and take a comprehensive and coordinated approach to tackle statelessness.
4. Addressing statelessness is not the work of governments alone. We encourage other actors, such as private sector and civil society organizations, to engage in this endeavor and support States, wherever appropriate, in order to achieve a more effective outcome.

Most importantly, we must not forget to listen to stateless persons to understand their needs, challenges and hopes.

5. Statelessness is not a situation in one particular country. We encourage States to learn from one another's experiences and best practices, and keep inspiring one another, similar to what we are doing here at the High-level segment. We would also like to invite Member States to consider joining the Group of Friends of the Campaign to continue working together on this noble cause.

Finally, we express our sincere appreciation to States and all relevant stakeholders that announce concrete pledges today. We hope to see continued and robust implementation of those pledges which will be a testament to our unwavering commitment. In order to achieve the goal of the #IBelong Campaign to end statelessness by 2024, we must accelerate our actions and make progress together.

Thank you.
