

STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

General Debate – High Level Segment on Statelessness
07 October 2019 | Palais Des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Mister/Madam chairperson, Mr. High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Colleagues, a pleasant afternoon.

It is a truism that statelessness affects millions of individuals, who, without a nationality, are unable to access, much less enjoy, their rights. It impinges on people's right to education, employment, healthcare, and participation in political affairs, as well as their freedom of movement and freedom from arbitrary detention, among others. Statelessness leaves them vulnerable to marginalization, discrimination, exploitation and abuse.

On the part of the Philippines, our deeply rooted culture of hospitality and compassion for others seeks to ensure that no one is left behind. Thus, in order to effectively address the challenges created by statelessness, the Philippine Government is guided by our adherence to human rights instruments, and our national policies and commitments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) following the fundamental Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* (or feeling one with others). We wish to underscore that the Philippines has identified statelessness as one of the priorities under its National Development Plan, and is also embedded in the country's long-term vision *Ambisyon Natin 2040*.

Mr. Chairperson, we are pleased to share some of the key achievements of our country in recent years to identify, prevent, reduce, and protect populations at risk of statelessness.

- In 2012, the Department of Justice finalized its rules establishing the refugee and stateless persons status determination procedure. Considered as the first in the Asia Pacific, the fully-functioning procedure is part of the Philippines' commitment to the implementation of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.
- Between 2014 and 2017, we launched the project on Registration and Confirmation of Nationality of Persons of Indonesian Descent (PIDs) wherein we have provided solutions to cases of 8,371 persons (95% of 8,745). This project addressed the risk of statelessness of PIDs in the southern Philippines, who due to centuries of traditional migration by sea between the peoples of Philippines and Indonesia, lacked proper documentation and familiarity with the citizenship requirements of the two countries.
- For the period of 2016 to August 2019, we have issued machine-readable convention travel documents to 527 refugees and stateless persons in the Philippines, in accordance with the Philippine Passport Act of 1996. We have also been issuing a stateless visa under the Philippine Immigration Act of 1940, as amended.
- In 2017, we adopted a National Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024 - a first in Southeast Asia and running in parallel with the #iBelong campaign. Among the key action points of the Plan are on resolving existing cases of statelessness, ensuring

that no child is born stateless, and improving the quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations.

- We also enhanced our legal and policy framework to address statelessness. This includes the promulgation of the Supreme Court landmark ruling which held that all foundlings found in the Philippines are presumed to be natural-born citizens; the exemption of refugees and stateless persons from securing Alien Employment Permits; and the assistance for asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons in having access to technical education and vocational training. More recently, we enacted a law, Republic Act 11055, which provides a single national ID to citizens as well as to persons of concern (POCs) for government transactions services.
- Furthermore, we also continue to conduct studies and bilateral and multi-stakeholder efforts on emerging populations who are at risk of statelessness.

While we have taken great strides to assist our persons of concern (POCs), we acknowledge that we can do more in addressing the issue of statelessness. Thus, the Philippines expresses its steadfast commitment to achieve the following:

- Further enhance the policy, legal, and operational framework for stateless persons to ensure their full access to rights as guaranteed by the 1954 Convention, including their facilitated naturalization and as may be provided by national laws;
- Improve access of vulnerable and marginalized populations to documentation through birth and civil registration;
- Continue the study of statelessness, with a thrust to improve data on populations at risk of statelessness, in continuation of efforts initiated in 2011;
- Continue the process of accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness;
- Continue leadership in Southeast Asia in the development of a human rights framework and provide technical support to other States in dealing with issues relating to stateless persons; and
- Cooperate with UNHCR by supporting projects, continuing fund contributions, and building or expanding partnerships.

In connection with the efforts against statelessness, the Philippines expresses its full support for the Global Compact on Refugees as a framework for Member States and stakeholders to engage and cooperate in a more predictable manner, consistent with the Refugee Conventions and other obligations under international law, and taking into account that States may contribute depending on their respective resources, capacities, and levels of expertise.

The Philippine Government also supports the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, which aims to uphold the sovereignty of States and foster international cooperation among all actors on migration.

Addressing statelessness is no easy task, but we are assured that with the Philippine Government continuing its partnership with civil society, academe, the private sector, and our persons of concern, as well as strengthening its engagements with fellow States, we can bring about positive change and tangible results. We owe it to every individual to ensure the fulfilment of their rights by working towards providing them with a nationality.
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