

UNHCR Annual NGO Consultations

Food for Thought Session: Statelessness

Thursday 16 June
13.00 – 14.30
Room 5



Photograph © R. Arnold/UNHCR

"Try to understand our lives.
We are also human beings."

Kavita, 22, Malaysia

Based on the theme of 'youth', and structured to provoke thought and generate discussion, this session will adopt a dynamic and participation based approach to the topic of stateless youth.

Stateless children and youth across the world face disadvantage in most areas of their lives. Be it difficulties accessing education, work or healthcare; restrictions on their freedom of movement; or the inability to own mobile phones or property, the disadvantages that statelessness brings are enormous.

Having to cope with all of this from a very young age can have a significant toll on the wellbeing and happiness of stateless children and youth. The burden that stateless children and youth carry includes:

The burden of their past – the injustice and discrimination, often against their parents or communities which caused their statelessness;

The burden of their present – the exclusion they encounter in all types of social interactions and activities; and

The burden of their future – the impossibility of pursuing their dreams and/or the necessity to temper them to fit within the smaller realm of possibility available to the stateless

NGOs, the UNHCR and other actors have a crucial role to play in helping to alleviate these burdens, in promoting and fulfilling the human rights of stateless youth and in ensuring as far as possible, that their statelessness is solved.

This requires a shift in the way we think about such issues, it requires placing stateless children and youth at the centre, and ensuring our collective accountability to them. It means first listening to stateless children and youth and then responding to their questions, concerns and needs.

This Food for Thought Session will be modelled around a series of questions that come directly from stateless youth to NGOs and UNHCR. These will include:

- **Questions about my past:** *How did I become stateless and what is being done to protect other children from this problem?*
- **Questions about my present:** *Why am I disadvantaged and denied access to basic rights, and what is being done to protect me?*
- **Questions about my future:** *What hope do I have for my future and what steps are being taken to grant me an appropriate nationality?*