

**Statement delivered by Ms Ruth ANNUS,
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High Level Segment on Statelessness and General Debate – Item 3**

Thank you Mister Chair,

Estonia fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. Allow me also to thank the Deputy Secretary General and High Commissioner for their opening remarks and the panelists of the High Level Segment on Statelessness for their inspiring thoughts.

I would now like to add some remarks in the national capacity.

First, we would like to thank again the High Commission and the whole UNHCR staff for your tireless work and leadership in providing assistance to the world's most vulnerable. While the global trends are not encouraging, the steps taken by the organization towards comprehensive multistakeholder approach on the refugee situations that implies also better cooperation and coordination between development and humanitarian actors are to the right direction. We commend special attention to the partnerships in the High Commissioner's report - while the traditional ones should be strengthened, new non-conventional ones are most welcome. Engaging further with the private sector and civil society at all levels would enable to develop longer-term, durable solutions. We should not shy away from the new innovative ways of working and contributing in order to ease the situation of refugees.

Estonia has been a stable contributor to the UNHCR and continues to hold its commitments. Recently we have contributed to alleviation of Syrian and Rohingya refugee situations and the IDP situation in Ukraine. We have kept the level of unearmarked contributions steady. We are particularly worried about the education of the refugee and internally displaced children and consider it one of the key issues for durable solutions. Estonia supports the children education in crises, for example, we are providing IT -training for the Za'atar and Azraq refugee camp children in Jordan and for the Duhok refugee camp children in Iraq. Avoiding "lost generations" is also a contribution in the wider peace and security context, in which Estonia is going to take more responsibility as an elected member of the Security Council for 2020-21.

Estonia finds it utmost important to have a holistic approach to resolving statelessness issues and this is what the I Belong Campaign is about. Persons of undetermined citizenship in Estonia have permanent residence permits and enjoy full social rights. Still the decrease of the number of persons of undetermined citizenship residing in Estonia continues to be the main objective of the Estonian naturalisation policy. At the same time we believe that citizenship cannot be forced on anyone and that everyone has the right to choose his or her citizenship – the Government can encourage the application for citizenship, facilitate language courses and

continue the individual approach to applicants. In recent years, Estonian Government has implemented various measures to increase the interest of persons with undetermined citizenship in applying for Estonian citizenship and several legislative changes have been adopted over the years to facilitate naturalisation procedures, especially for children and elderly. Since January 2016 children born in Estonia whose parents are with undetermined citizenship and have resided in Estonia at least five years get Estonian citizenship automatically from the moment of birth, before that date it was upon the application of parents. Nevertheless, despite the headway made in the last twenty years, Estonia acknowledges that even further efforts must be made to promote the idea of becoming an Estonian citizen amongst persons with undetermined citizenship and facilitate appropriate means for that.

Finally, we would like to commend and support the UNHCR`s reform efforts. As in our own society, we believe the human must be in the centre of any solutions. The regionalization and localization path taken by the UNHCR are guiding us to the same direction. We, Estonians, are also true believers of digital innovative solutions that could save not only time and money, but also lives. Interoperable databases, innovative identification and registration tools with reliable data protection solutions and predicting large population movements with the help of AI could contribute to avoid leaving anyone behind. Estonia is ready and willing to continue working with the UNHCR for that goal.

Thank you!