

SRI-LANKA



**Statement by Sri Lanka at the High-Level Segment on  
Statelessness of the UNHCR Executive Committee Meeting  
9 October 2019**

The discussion on the subject of statelessness is more relevant today in the context of the growing trend of rejection of the 'other' based on a multiplicity of factors. It is a matter of concern both from the point of view of human rights that requires all human beings be treated equally, as well as from the perspective of the principles of humanity which call for the protection of persons from vulnerabilities. As we may note, statelessness remains among the grave sources of vulnerabilities even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

While the world is addressing the challenges pertaining to those seeking asylum and to refugees through the adoption of the Global Compact for Refugees, and the challenges relating to migration through the Global Compact on Safe and Orderly Migration, they do not, however, establish any new norms, but provide only a recapitulation and clarification of already existing standards and obligations. Although these are not substitutes for 'real action' required at different levels, it is noted that the issue of statelessness has so far not received a similar consideration or treatment in a global or regional context.

There are international legal instruments on this subject in the form of two Conventions relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and on the Reduction of Statelessness, of 1954 and 1961. While pursuing the increased acceptance of these two Conventions proactively, it is important that international protection for stateless persons is galvanized further through a voluntary and inclusive framework which brings all stakeholders on a single platform of striving for the recognition of the integrity and dignity of the stateless. It is all the more pertinent that in a volatile regional and global landscape that characterizes the ongoing challenges to peace and security, the two Conventions on Statelessness are acknowledged as the legitimate and legal architecture which can assure a predictable status and future for people without a nationality, citizenship and attendant rights. It is our fervent hope that all countries will accord the highest priority to addressing the challenge of statelessness, wherever it prevails, to ensure that they contribute productively to the progress of the societies which the stateless persons live in.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places the rights of individuals at its core. It is incumbent on all States to strive hard to make the UN Development Agenda

meaningful to every segment of the global population. In the scheme of the UN Development Agenda, underpinned by the public policy that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century demands for its practical and meaningful implementation, there is no place for Statelessness. In fact SDG 16 – just and inclusive society-is key to effective governance, rule of law, and fairness, built on peace and security that contributes to human progress. When statelessness is allowed to persist, it is all but natural that those rights would only be rendered nugatory for a considerable segment of the global population. In this era of modernity and technological advances, it is inconceivable that there can be two categories of human beings: one, with a state along with attendant rights; and the other, stateless, with rights denied, and thus lacking in all fundamentals that are required for a dignified existence.

Sri Lanka had grappled with the issue of statelessness several decades ago. It was in the context of the newly independent country, seeking to assert its identity through defining citizenship as far back as 1948. This led to a number of persons then resident in Sri Lanka not being qualified as citizens pursuant to the enactment of laws. However, Sri Lanka has since come a long way in addressing effectively the issue of statelessness through a mix of legal and executive measures, which also included bilateral agreements. These have ensured that all persons living in the country who call Sri Lanka their home today are recognized as citizens in accordance with the applicable laws, and enjoy the protection of the State as its nationals.

Based on our national experience as well as given the current regional and international contexts where a state of statelessness continues to affect different communities around the world, Sri Lanka would earnestly request the international community and the UNHCR to give priority to addressing this challenge in a more meaningful and practical manner. This would include provision of technical/expert assistance to countries where statelessness remains a continuing challenge so that they could have the capacity and means to address this challenge with urgent priority.

Sri Lanka has progressively addressed and reduced Statelessness over several decades, and specially since the 1980s. The norms contained in the two Conventions, as relevant to a country which has addressed this challenge successfully amidst constraints, have permeated our legal and policy frameworks as well as national consciousness and governance. This has led to an appreciation of the value of stakeholderhip in advancing the principles and objectives of the two Conventions as we advance our national vision for a more inclusive, peaceful, secure and prosperous Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka stands ready to work with UNHCR and other partners in enhancing this stakeholderhip, while sharing lessons learnt and good practices with other countries.