

The Urdu Speakers of Bangladesh

The plight of the Urdu-speaking community, whose ancestors moved to Bangladesh from India following the 1947 partition of the subcontinent, stems from the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971. For many years, the right to citizenship for almost 300,000 Urdu speakers (sometimes called Biharis) was not recognized. Many were denied access to education and had difficulty finding work. In 2008, the High Court in Dhaka ruled that the Urdu speakers were nationals. The Government responded swiftly by registering the Urdu speakers as voters and issued them with national ID cards.



Nowhere People

THE WORLD'S STATELESS

Nationality might seem like a universal birthright, but an estimated 12 million people around the world are struggling to get along without it. They are stateless. This often leaves them unable to do the basic things most people take for granted, such as registering the birth of a child, travelling, going to school, opening a bank account or owning property.

Under its statelessness mandate, UNHCR is advising stateless people on their rights and assisting them in their applications for citizenship. It also supports legal reform to prevent people from becoming stateless.

Greg Constantine is an award-winning photojournalist from the United States. His project, "Nowhere People," documents the plight of stateless people around the world.

The Dalits of Nepal

Many people in Nepal's Terai region were not considered Nepalese citizens and, until recently, could not obtain identification papers. Some 3.4 million people encountered difficulties in sending their children to school or buying land. Many of the worst affected have been Dalits. In 2006, the Government adopted a new Citizenship Act and, in 2007, hundreds of mobile teams delivered citizenship certificates to 2.6 million people. But many Dalits have yet to be reached.

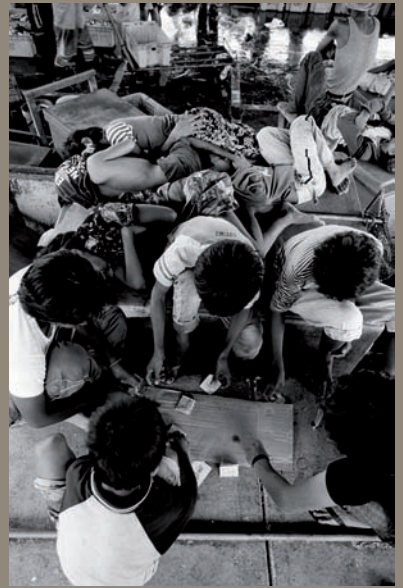


Muslim refugees from Myanmar

Sometimes people who are not recognized as citizens can also be refugees. Bangladesh has been hosting Muslim refugees from western Myanmar for 18 years. While many of them have returned to Myanmar, some 28,000 remain in two camps in Bangladesh while an additional estimated 200,000 unregistered live outside the camps. Despite resource constraints, the Government of Bangladesh – with assistance from UNHCR – has made efforts to improve their situation.

Lost Children of Sabah

For several decades, the state of Sabah in Malaysian Borneo has been host to refugees from the Philippines and migrants from Indonesia and the Philippines. The children of these groups often end up stateless or at risk of statelessness. An estimated 10,000 to 30,000 are affected because they have no means of proving a link to any country.



The Galjeel in Kenya

The Galjeel, numbering 3,500 to 4,000 people, are a sub-clan of Somali descent and have lived in Kenya since the late 1930s. For many decades, the Galjeel held Kenyan ID cards, participated in elections, owned businesses and enjoyed full access to state services. But in 1989, some members of the community lost these rights and benefits. Confirming their Kenyan nationality and restoring identity documents would help the Galjeel to resume their lives with full enjoyment of their rights under the Kenyan Constitution.

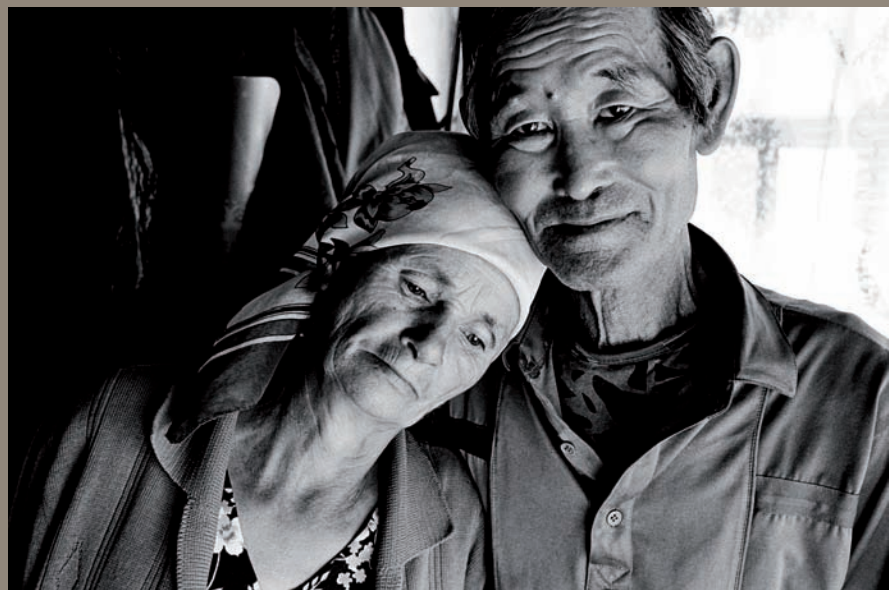






The Nubians in Kenya

In the late 1880s, Nubians from Sudan were conscripted into the British army and taken to Kenya. They were granted homesteads and issued British colonial passports. However, after Kenya independence in 1963, Nubian land claims went unrecognized. By 2000, thousands of migrants were occupying the Nubians' land. Many Nubians have difficulty in gaining access to national ID cards, employment and higher education. In recent years, the authorities have eased some of these restrictions and many Nubians have been confirmed as Kenyan citizens.



Stateless in Ukraine

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created complex political and legal issues of state succession. Overnight, millions of Soviet citizens were left stateless, as many did not acquire the nationality of any of the successor States. In Ukraine, a citizenship law was adopted the same year as the Soviet Union's disintegration. It granted citizenship to those residing in the country at the time of the law's passage. Persons arriving after 1991 with Soviet passports or without documents faced difficulties. UNHCR worked with the Government of Ukraine to improve the citizenship law and procedures to assist these people to acquire citizenship. Although Ukraine's efforts to combat statelessness have achieved a great deal, thousands of people from former Soviet Republics still face legal, administrative and financial hurdles when seeking to confirm or acquire citizenship of Ukraine or another successor State. Continued efforts are necessary to prevent statelessness from being inherited by future generations.