

Statement of the Director of the Division of International Protection

for the 81st Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee on the Statelessness CRP

on Tuesday 6 July 2021 at 15:00 – 18:00

I'd like to begin by thanking everyone for their continued engagement and commitment to address statelessness. We are very aware that we can only achieve the ambitious objectives of the #IBelong Campaign through strong partnerships with Member States, UN sister agencies, other international organizations, and of course civil society.

I'm pleased to report that there has been significant progress on statelessness since the last update, as set out in detail in the Conference Room Paper. Despite the negative impact COVID has had on stateless people in the past year, there have continued to be notable achievements. As of April 2021, at least 19 pledges made by States at the High-Level Segment (HLS) have been fully implemented, and another 12 partially implemented. Eight States in Africa developed national action plans and strategies to resolve statelessness (the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Madagascar, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan and Uganda). Several States have taken important new steps to reduce existing situations of statelessness, including notably Uzbekistan and Kenya, while many others have continued ongoing reduction efforts, such as Thailand and Malaysia. Many States have also introduced reforms to prevent statelessness from occurring in the first place: in the Islamic Republic of Iran for example there has been a partial removal of gender discrimination from their nationality law and as of today we understand that over 1400 children in Iran have now been able to acquire nationality through their mothers thanks to this reform. A number of States strengthened safeguards against statelessness at birth, including Albania, Latvia, and Mexico. Statelessness determination procedures (SDPs) were established in at least 5 new countries (Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, Iceland, Kazakhstan and Ukraine), with Cote D'Ivoire's being the first SDP on the African continent. Progress has also been made towards universal and accessible birth registration. Hundreds of thousands of birth certificates were issued to persons at risk of statelessness, and multiple countries have made improvements to their civil registration laws, practices, and systems, including in Central Asia.

As many of you are aware, this year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961 Convention). Since the last update, Angola, Colombia, Iceland, Malta and North Macedonia have acceded to one or both Statelessness Conventions, bringing the total number of States parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons to 95 and to the 1961 Convention to 76. Other States have taken steps to accede (such as the Republic of the Congo) or withdrew reservations (such as Sweden).

Considerable efforts are being made to improve qualitative and quantitative data on statelessness. UNHCR and partners conducted studies and surveys in nine countries to better identify the size and profile of stateless populations. UNHCR and the World Bank collaborated on a groundbreaking study on the socioeconomic implications of statelessness among the Shona minority in Kenya. And most notably and importantly, work is underway to develop new international recommendations on statelessness statistics (IROSS) under the auspices of the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (EGRIS) for adoption by the UN Statistics Commission in 2023, an endeavor on which we count on your support.

At the regional level, regional organizations have continued to drive and support change, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Europe, ECOSOC, and others. In the Americas, the role of the OAS through its *Universal Civil Identity Program* and the CLARCIEV (*Latin American and Caribbean Council for Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV)*) has been key in advancing the implementation of the pledges made at the HLS. Notably in May, LAS Members agreed in principle on a new Regional Plan of Action to implement the 2018 Declaration on Identity and Belonging. This now needs to go to the Interior and Justice Ministers' Councils for approval. If approved, this will be a very positive step forward in a region that has many statelessness-related challenges.

UNHCR has also continued to strengthen other partnerships aimed at ending and preventing statelessness. To combat childhood statelessness, UNHCR worked with UNICEF, and UN entities and civil society organizations through the Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality, and joint strategies to address childhood statelessness are now in place in some twenty countries. We have also worked with UN Women, UNDP and others to increase awareness on the importance of achieving gender equality in nationality laws and strengthened the partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union through the organization of several advocacy and training events and webinars with parliamentarians.

We likewise continued to provide technical assistance to States and other stakeholders and produced new tools and publications to support others, including: new guidelines on the loss and deprivation of nationality to help address the growing trend relating to the deprivation of citizenship; updates on good practices papers and the background note on gender equality in nationality laws; and two papers on the impact of COVID-19 on stateless populations, the first one published in May 2020, and the second one in June 2021 addressing the important issue of access to vaccines for stateless persons. We have also worked with universities and others to organize more annual dedicated statelessness courses than ever before in more parts of the world than ever before.

In addition, we are making serious efforts to reflect statelessness in other important areas of the organization's work, such as UNHCR's "Strategic framework for climate action" and the follow-up processes to the Global Refugee Forum.

Of course, despite the many achievements, persistent challenges remain and new ones present themselves. A strong, collective final push is needed in the final years of the #IBelong Campaign to implement the pledges that were made at the HLS and eradicate statelessness. As we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the 1961 Convention, UNHCR will organize a special treaty event in September 2021 in partnership with the UN Treaty Office to raise awareness and advocate for universal accession as well as to welcome those who have recently joined the Convention or do so at this event. We are also now in the process of reviewing two significant evaluations of the progress made to address statelessness since the start of the #IBelong Campaign, one by UNHCR and one by the US Department of State. These will be discussed further at the side event on statelessness to take place tomorrow over the lunch break so for now I will just flag that these provide a very welcome opportunity to reflect on potential improvements and we are hopeful that we can leverage the recommendations that have been made to help propel efforts by all relevant stakeholders during the remaining years of the #IBelong Campaign.