

**Seventieth session of the Executive Committee
of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom)**

**Q&A for the Deputy Secretary-General for the High-level
Segment on Statelessness**

Geneva, 7 October 2019

The high-level segment will begin with a conversation between UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Cate Blanchett, and Ms. Maha Mamo, activist and former stateless person.

Ms. Anita Rani, radio and TV broadcaster, will then moderate the panel discussion, posing several questions to each panellist in two rounds.

Questions posed to Madam Deputy Secretary-General by Ms. Rani

1. As the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, you are faced with global problems and crises on a daily basis. Why is statelessness an important issue to resolve and how does it relate strategically to other problems and opportunities?

- In today's world, human suffering remain prevalent. We see increasing violation of individual rights as world faces strong headwinds – Inward facing ideology, hate speech, intolerance and much more.
- Statelessness in on an increase and protracted situations of statelessness can lead to discrimination, discontent and societal tensions that, in their most extreme forms, can provoke violence and displacement.
- This is why the Secretary-General has placed emphasis on Prevention as critical to avoiding the causes of some these issues and the SDGs as the fundamental framework that enables us to provide development to all.

I would like to focus on four key aspects;

- **First**, Human Rights – according to Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to a nationality and none shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality or denied the right to change his nationality. Not adhering to this is denying people’s fundamental rights with dire consequences.
- We cannot expect people to fully participate in any society without legal recognition starting at birth, through to going to school, getting married or when travelling.
- **Second**, it is a moral imperative for everyone to belong to a human family and to be recognised beyond their name, regardless of where they were born or which territories they find themselves in after a transfer of territory.
- **Third**, not addressing Statelessness in the timeframe that we have will have significant implications for leaving no one behind as rights would have been lost,

increasing insecurity and often times these individuals are subject to all manner of abuse.

- **Fourth**, the I Belong Campaign, which cuts across three pillars of the UN system: **peace and security, human rights, and development** allows us to focus and address issues of legal identity at birth, discrimination, equal access to basic services, decent work and opportunities, strengthening social cohesion and promoting harmonious societies.
- The Secretary-General has urged the remaining 25 countries that maintain discriminatory provisions in their nationality laws to expedite reforms by the end of UNHCR’s I-Belong Campaign in 2024.
- In his 2018 Guidance Note on the United Nations and Statelessness, the SG states that: “the reduction of statelessness can bolster national reconciliation and help prevent a return to conflict. When linked with efforts to address underlying societal discrimination, action to resolve statelessness may also form the basis for poverty reduction and sustainable, inclusive development.”

2. *You played an important role in nurturing the negotiations of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. What is the relevance of the SDGs to this issue and are States doing enough to implement their SDG commitments?*

- A major objective of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind.
- Many of the SDGs and related targets are pertinent to improving the living conditions of stateless persons.
- Integrating targets of inequality, justice, legal proof, discrimination, ethnicity, religion and gender in operationalising the SDG and strengthening the last four years of the Action Plan will go a long way to ensuring we achieve the SDGs.
- For example, **SDG 10, Target 10.3 requires States to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices.**

- Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, gender and language remains the leading cause of statelessness, and more than 75% of the world's known stateless people belong to minority groups.
- Promoting international standards relating to non-discrimination, with respect to the right to nationality and the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality, is therefore vital.
- **SDG 16, Target 16.9 states that legal identity should be provided for all, including birth registration. This is relevant to the prevention and reduction of statelessness through the provision of birth registration and, in certain cases, nationality documentation – which are both examples of proof of legal identity.**
- At the General Assembly some weeks ago, the Secretary-General launched the Decade of Action demanding not just greater ambition and more urgency but also a different response to the 2030 Agenda than we have seen over the past four

years. We need to narrow the gap between vision and reality and operationalizing the paradigm shift

- We need to find ways to translate the principle of Leaving No One Behind into practise, through crucial actions such as ending statelessness.
- In my role as Chairperson of the United Nations Legal Identity Expert Group, I wish to assure you that I plan to maintain a focus on statelessness – an issue that must be addressed as part of that group’s efforts to support States in their commitment to achieve the objectives of Target 16.9.
- But we need all hands-on deck to achieve the SDGs and we count on the support of all of you.