

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE  
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME  
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**NGO Statement on Statelessness**

Agenda Item 2b

Oral Version

432 Words

Mr. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Statelessness is a global issue which can be solved through strong legal, political and diplomatic engagement. NGOs endorse the UNHCR led *#Ibelong* campaign to end statelessness by 2024, and urge states to do so too. NGOs welcome state action to address statelessness in Latin-America through the Brazil Declaration, and in Africa through the ECOWAS Declaration. But far greater regional action is still required in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. NGOs are encouraged that statelessness is included within the Sustainable Development Goals.

We recognize gender discriminatory nationality laws as one of the greatest contributors to statelessness and we call on States to ensure full gender equality in their nationality laws. NGOs with UNHCR initiated a Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights to urge the 27 states that deny women equal rights to confer nationality to their children, to reform their laws. Furthermore, NGOs around the world are working to ensure that all children enjoy the right to a nationality, including in Europe through a Campaign to End Childhood Statelessness.

NGOs remain concerned that large numbers of Palestinian refugees in the Arab world have remained stateless. NGOs encourage UNHCR, in collaboration with UNRWA, to join them in engaging Arab states on this sensitive issue.

While acknowledging the above advances, NGOs remain concerned about developments that undermine protection and can increase statelessness, including discrimination based on sex, ethnicity and religion. NGOs urge UNHCR and states to enhance protection for stateless refugees, especially Rohingya refugees who were pushed back out to sea by Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia in May 2015. NGOs are also concerned that, unless preventative action is further prioritised, mass displacement resulting from the Syrian conflict in conjunction with sex-discriminatory laws could lead to statelessness among children born to refugees. One of the less anticipated consequences of the devastating earthquakes in Nepal has been that stateless people and those who have lost identity documents are now facing difficulty accessing aid and proving property ownership; this threat is exacerbated by the inability of Nepali women to confer nationality to their children due to sex-discriminatory laws and practices. These are pertinent reminders that the impacts of statelessness and gender discrimination are far reaching, especially in the aftermath of natural and man-made disasters.

NGOs record deep concern over states depriving citizens of their nationality because of political dissent (in Kuwait and Bahrain) or suspected terrorism (in the UK), and with the Dominican Republic's arbitrary deprivation of nationality of tens-of-thousands of Dominicans

of Haitian descent. Such developments gravely undermine recent positive progress in global efforts to eradicate statelessness.

Thank you, Mr Chair