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## **Ending statelessness: The critical role of law reform**

**UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Inter-Parliamentary Union**

**High-level Political Forum 2019**

**18 July 2019, 2.30 to 4.30 p.m.  
UN Church Center, 777 UN Plaza, New York**

### **CONCEPT NOTE**

#### **Background**

Statelessness, or the absence of a nationality, affects some 10 million people globally. There is no region on the planet that does not have significant numbers of stateless persons.

In addition to the indignity of being without a nationality, stateless persons are denied their basic rights. For stateless men and women, boys and girls, access to education, health care and other public services can be a real challenge. Their exclusion from citizenship marks their lives, and those of their families and communities, in dramatic ways. Yet, while statelessness is a serious problem, it is one that can be resolved with relatively simple changes in national law and practice.

The leading causes of statelessness include: lack of legislative safeguards; discrimination in nationality laws, including laws that prevent women from being able to pass on their nationality on an equal basis as men; and State secession. Administrative and practical barriers to acquiring identity documentation also contribute to statelessness. Law reform has a vital role to play in ending statelessness – with appropriate legislative and policy change, the international community can put an end to statelessness in the near future.

This event aims to raise awareness of the issue of statelessness amongst parliamentarians and other stakeholders who will be gathered in New York on the occasion of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). It will examine how law reforms can achieve the goal of ending statelessness. Panellists will provide information about UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024, and about the relevance to statelessness of SDG 16 (on peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 5 (on gender equality and women's empowerment), currently under review at the HLPF. Target 16.9 provides that by 2030 States are to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration. Target 5.1 requires States to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, which includes nationality laws.

Parliamentarians can and have played a vital role in bringing about law reforms that prevent or reduce statelessness. Nationality laws should ensure that individuals are not arbitrarily deprived of their citizenship; that all persons enjoy equal rights regardless of gender, ethnicity, race or religion; and that children are granted a nationality in circumstances in which they would otherwise be stateless.

Parliamentarians can help end statelessness by adopting and ensuring the implementation of domestic legislation that is consistent with international law and standards. Parliamentarians can also play an important role in promoting their States' accession to the two United Nations statelessness conventions (the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness), which provide the international legal framework for protecting stateless persons and preventing and reducing statelessness.

The event will take the form of a panel discussion, bringing together members of parliament, civil society representatives and UN agencies as well as stateless men and women who will share their experiences. Each panellist will talk about reforms to nationality laws to address statelessness, including:

- the process of lobbying/advocating for legislative change, including the obstacles panellists faced and how they were overcome;
- the relevance and achievements of UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign;
- the practical impact of legislative change with respect to identifying and protecting stateless persons and conferring nationality on stateless persons;
- success stories following accession to the 1954 Convention and/or the 1961 Convention, as well as any regional instruments (including declarations and plans of action).

Background information will be made available, including the IPU/UNHCR handbook for parliamentarians [Good practices in nationality laws for the prevention and reduction of statelessness](#).

The event is open to members of parliament attending the HLPF as well as other stakeholders involved in efforts to put an end to statelessness. It will be in **English only**.

**Moderator:** Ms. Ninette Kelley, Director of the UNHCR Office in New York

**Panellists:**

- Ms. Agnes Vadai, President of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, MP (Hungary)
- Mr. Gideon Ochanda, MP (Kenya), Chairperson of the Parliamentary Caucus on Sustainable Development and Business
- Ms. Maha Mamo, statelessness activist and former stateless person
- Ms. Catherine Harrington, Director of the [Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights](#)

For further information, please write to [ny-office@ipu.org](mailto:ny-office@ipu.org)