



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Africa Regional Multistakeholder Convening on Advancing Gender Equality in Nationality Laws

Geneva, 24 February 2026

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues,

It is a pleasure for me to address you today on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. From the outset, I would like to thank each of the organizations – the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, Equality Now, the Global Alliance to end Statelessness, UNHCR and UN Women – which partnered with the IPU to organize this very important gathering, bringing representatives from the African region to discuss strategies on how to advance gender equality in nationality laws.

This Convening marks an important step in the regional and global efforts to eliminate gender discrimination in nationality laws, which follows the success of our Global Multistakeholder Summit, which took place in Geneva in December 2024. The Summit, which some of you attended, created a unique opportunity for dialogue and exchange on how different stakeholders can work together towards advancing gender-equal nationality rights. Since then, important reforms have been undertaken, but much is yet to be done.

Today, women are still denied the right to confer their nationality on their children on an equal basis as men in over 24 countries – with 7 of these countries being in the African region. Around 40% of the African countries also deny women the right to pass their nationality to their foreign spouse on an equal basis with men. While these provisions stem from specific national situations and considerations, all of them have a similar impact; they are discriminatory; they lead to hardships for the affected families, women and children, lack of respect for basic human rights and impact development and social cohesion. These discriminatory provisions are also a major cause of statelessness.

This is why I would like to challenge all of us today. How can we explain to our African sisters that they cannot pass their nationality to their own children? How can we justify to mothers across our continent that their children will be born stateless and be denied education, health care, full access to services and the core feeling of belonging, simply because of laws in place? We must no longer let gender discriminatory nationality laws condemn women and men, girls and boys from our continent to statelessness and exclusion. And for all these accounts, this issue is a concern for the IPU.

Fighting gender discrimination and putting an end to statelessness are closely aligned with the IPU's mission to empower parliaments and parliamentarians to promote peace, democracy and sustainable development around the world.

The IPU has been engaged in fighting statelessness for close to 20 years now. Following our pledge to the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and as a proud member of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, the IPU is committed to continue its work on supporting efforts towards enhancing parliamentary engagement in the fight against statelessness. We are convinced that ending gender discrimination in nationality laws – a root cause of many of the over 4 million cases of statelessness identified today in the world – cannot be achieved without meaningful parliamentary engagement.

And we know that the Africa region can lead the way towards such a goal. Countries such as **Madagascar** and **Liberia** have shown what is possible by reforming their nationality laws to grant

women equal rights to confer citizenship to their children. Recently, key achievements such as the new *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Relating to the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa* adopted in 2024, and the *Continental Consultation Meeting on the Model Law on the Right to Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness*, convened by the Pan-African Parliament in partnership with UNHCR, in 2025, bear testimony to how Africa can lead the world in equality and justice.

On this second day of this Convening, where you have been working on strategic approaches and leveraging your role in nationality laws reform process, I would like to leave you with two key messages on how the role played by parliaments can make a significant difference in advancing gender-equal nationality rights at the national level:

- **First**, parliaments have the tools and opportunity to make a change. They can foster strong political will. As decision-makers, parliamentarians can push for legislative reforms on nationality laws, even amidst complex and sensitive settings. They can adopt and ensure implementation of legislation that is consistent with international law, thus resolving and preventing statelessness domestically.
- **Second**, parliaments can, and must, be the voice of the voiceless. They are well-positioned to listen to, and address misconceptions, alleviate misunderstandings and lead by example. Addressing gender inequality requires a societal change and parliamentarians can and must be the champions of such a change.

Colleagues,

TO CONCLUDE, the IPU would like on this occasion to renew its commitment to mobilizing and engaging the parliamentary community in fighting discrimination in nationality laws and ending statelessness. We are confident that the outcome of this Convening will result in amplifying efforts and building partnerships for significant change and reforms in the African region. You can count on the IPU, and all the partners here today, to support your efforts towards this goal.