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## Address by Dr. Ágnes Vadai, MP from Hungary and Chair of the IPU Committee for respect and promotion of the International Humanitarian Law

**Delivered at the *African Regional Parliamentary Conference:  
Comprehensive Responses to Refugee Situations – Effective  
Parliamentary Approaches***

Pan African Parliament Headquarters  
Midrand, 11 November 2019

Colleagues,  
Good afternoon,

Let me start by thanking you for giving me a second opportunity to exchange with you as chair of the IPU IHL Committee. It is always a pleasure for me to have such opportunities for learning and building common strategies and efforts together.

I will go straight to the point. I have been asked to outline the various roles and strategies for MPs to address statelessness. Some of what I will say will build on what I have already said yesterday.

The first point I would like to begin with relates to the importance of understanding what being a stateless person actually means. For many of us, having a nationality seems to be a given, an obvious fact of life. A right taken for granted. And to be honest, there is no reason why in today's world anyone should be deprived of or live without a nationality.

Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "[e]veryone has the right to a nationality" and that "[n]o one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality".

Concretely, this means that we all have the right to have a legal connection with a State. We all have the right to a sense of identity, to the protection of a State and to fundamental civil and political rights.

This is a right and yet today, millions of men and women, girls and boys in the world have no nationality and are stateless.

This means that millions of people today cannot live a life that you or I would call "normal"; cannot enroll their children in school, own or lease property, work, marry, travel or vote. Or even bury their dead. These men and women are not entitled to dream or project themselves in the future – how could they when their present is non-existent. They are invisible and might just as well not exist.

So we must all put ourselves in the shoes of a stateless person – someone who is invisible, has no rights and has no voice.

My second point is that we need to keep in mind as legislators and opinion leaders, that solutions exist and that it is actually possible to put an end to statelessness in the years to come.

My third point is about legal frameworks, which are a first answer to addressing statelessness.

We know that the solution resides in building a legal framework that prevents and prohibits statelessness. This means addressing discrimination in laws and in particular gender based discrimination. Members of parliament have a responsibility to raise this in their countries, review laws and amend them. And we have seen results – women MPs for instance working across party lines and initiating bills to address key inequality issues, defending the rights of those that are often not heard and forgotten.

My fourth point is about enforcement. We know that laws are only as good as the effort and resources put into them. This therefore means constant monitoring of the impact of law and budget allocations aimed at supporting enforcement programmes and structures. For members of parliament it means regularly questioning the government on implementation and scrutinizing and adopting resources for impact. And here again, we have seen MPs questioning their government, asking for accounts and reallocating resources during budgetary debates, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and the voiceless.

This also means reaching out to our communities to directly assess the impact of the law and identify administrative bottlenecks that may limit effects. For instance, ensuring gratuity of birth registration or facilitating access to birth registration with more services, simplified procedures etc is one way to practically support efforts to eliminate statelessness, without necessarily requiring legal reforms.

My last point is about visibility and knowledge. For laws to be effective, they must be widely known and understood so that they can be enforced. We heard of the challenge raised by the notion of statelessness – how difficult it is to understand, visualize and monitor. Members of parliament, as opinion leaders can and do spread the word – as representatives of the people, we engage with constituents on a regular basis, listen and explain so that those that have no voice are represented as well.

In the case of stateless person we have an obligation to reach out to them to make sure that their basic rights and interests are also taken into account and heard.

Now we have heard of solutions – what does it take then to act. What do we need?

- We need brave leadership and political will
- We need knowledge and understanding; tools and support
- We need partnerships within our societies and building a coalition for change

At the recent UNHCR Executive Committee high level debate, UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohamed recalled that acting to end statelessness was not only a human right obligation, it is was also a moral one. We have the tools, we know the answers, we need to act.