

**SPECIAL ADDRESS**  
**Global Summit on Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws**  
*Ecumenical Center, Geneva, Switzerland*  
*Tuesday, June 13, 2023*  
*2:00 pm – 5:00 pm*

***Delivered by:***  
*Mrs. Williametta E. Saydee-Tarr*  
***Honorable Minister of Gender, Children & Social Protection***

**PROTOCOL:**

*Madam Sarah Costa, Executive Director of the Women’s Refugee Commission;*

*Members of the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights;*

*Representatives of the United Nations, present;*

*Permanent Representatives of Member States, present;*

*Representatives of Governments, here present;*

*Co-Speakers;*

*Members of the Donor Community;*

*Human Rights Organizations; other Civil Society Leaders and Organizations, and Religious Leaders, present;*

*Members of the Fourth Estate;*

*Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen:*

Good Afternoon!

I bring you greetings from the President of the Republic of Liberia, and our Feminist-In-Chief, His Excellency, Dr. George Manneh Weah, under whose authority I have been privileged to serve my country and opportune to be here today to speak to you all as Liberia’s Minister of Gender, Children & Social Protection.

I am deeply honored by this invitation extended to me by the ***Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights and the Women’s Refugee Commission in collaboration with UNHCR, UNICEF, and UN Women, to share Liberia’s notable reform which now confers to women the same rights as men to confer nationality to children and spouses.***

I would like to highlight that it was not an “easy ride” to make these reforms on our nationality law. We would like to thank and appreciate the President, His Excellency Dr. George Manneh

Weah for signing into Law on July 22, 2022, Liberia's new nationality law. The law, which is titled "***An Act to Amend and/or Nullify Certain Provisions of the Aliens and Nationality Law Relating to Citizenship and Restoring the Citizenship Rights Lost as a Consequence of those Provisions***" commonly referred to as the ***Aliens and Nationalities Law***, has now legally removed the gender discrimination in Liberia's nationality law.

Because of ***the President's political will and drive for achieving gender equality as a HeForShe Champion***, we were able ***to remove this archaic stereotype against women relative to conferring nationality on their children born outside of the Republic of Liberia***. This is not strange to us, as the President remains optimistic and determined to ensure that Liberia achieves gender equality. The President is passionate about this and he is bound to set a legacy footprint –his approach has been intentional and purposeful to see issues like these resolved by being front and center on the fight against sexual and gender-based violence and to tackle all forms of discrimination against women.

Prior to the passage of the Law by our Legislature and the subsequent signing by the President, His Excellency Dr. George Manneh Weah, several provisions, including, ***Part III, Chapter 20, 21, and 22 of "Title 4 of the Liberian Code of Laws Revised"*** also known as the ***"1973 Aliens and Nationality Law"*** ***clearly violated the rights of Liberian women and children***. The Law ***discriminated Liberian citizenship rights between a person born of Liberian parents (be it the father and/or the mother) on Liberian soil on the one hand, and a person born of Liberian parents outside of Liberia on the other hand***.

For instance, ***"Chapter 20, Section 20.1 (b)"*** provided that for a person to become a citizen of Liberia at birth, consideration was ***ONLY GIVEN*** to "a person born outside Liberia whose ***father*** (i) was born a citizen of Liberia; (ii) was a citizen of Liberia at the time of the birth of such child, and (iii) had resided in Liberia prior to the birth of such child". ***This provision in the previous law DID NOT PROVIDE FOR a person born outside of Liberia to obtain citizenship through his/her "MOTHER"***. This was discriminatory!

Indeed, ***the provisions contained in the 1973 Aliens and Nationality Law WERE ALL IN VIOLATION of the 1986 Constitution of the Republic of Liberia***, particularly the equal protection clause. I would like to make a few specific references to the Constitution of the Republic of Liberia:

1. ***Article 11 (b) and (c)*** provide that, ***"All persons irrespective of... sex...are entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms..."*** and that, ***"All persons are equal before the law and are therefore entitled to the equal protection of the law"***
2. ***"Article 28"*** also provides that, ***"Any person, at least one of whose parents was a citizen of Liberia at the time of the person's birth, shall be a citizen of Liberia..."***.

Legal scholars would argue that the ***1973 Aliens and Nationality Law was in flagrant violation of human rights and that it discriminated against females*** thereby undermining the achievement of gender equality within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Is this true? Yes, this is true! Many Liberians also believe so! You all would agree with me that this old law ***DID NOT*** uphold women and men's equal rights to confer nationality on children and their spouses and provide far-reaching negative consequences on all aspects of family life – subjecting children, women and foreign spouses to restriction in movements; restriction in job opportunities; restriction in education opportunities; restriction or limited access to finance, including opening bank accounts; restriction in owning or inheriting properties – all of these, coupled with the huge burden on women's inability to equally confer citizenship has placed huge financial, psychological and physical constraints on families, leading to intergenerational poverty – getting poorer and poorer by the day! ***IT IS ABOUT TIME, THAT WE ALL RALLY WITH NATIONS AROUND THE WORLD TO MAKE REFORMS THAT WILL ONCE AND FOREVER END LEGAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN!***

Has Liberia made progress in this regard? Yes, we have but more needs to be done as we are in a global village – what affects one, affects all!

Prior to reaching the point of removing and ending gender discrimination in our nationality law, there were many hurdles and setbacks. As recently as 2008, during the former regime, a bill that sought to address citizenship and nationality ***FAILED***. Again, in 2015, under the previous government, the Constitutional Review Committee ***DID NOT*** succeed in making reforms to citizenship and nationality.

Under the leadership of His Excellency, Dr. George Manneh Weah, we have been able to address gender discrimination in our nationality law, with an unwavering focus and commitment towards achieving gender equality, eradicating the risks of statelessness, and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. The ***process required engagement*** with all ***stakeholders, including the Legislature*** (to ensure that the Bill was placed on the Floor for deliberations, send to Committee Room for review, and for final passage by the Legislature); as well as ***civil society organizations*** (to increase advocacy and beef up awareness).

To make amendments to the law is not an event, but a process! We would like to ***encourage other countries to emanate the good lessons learned from Liberia and other countries, including Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Benin*** – just to name a few - ***and their approach to nationality laws reform to make a necessary radical change in their nationality laws.***

With determination, zeal, and togetherness, we all can end statelessness and promote gender equality even in our nationality laws, globally.

***We DO NOT want to live in a world where a child cannot be registered at birth!***

***We DO NOT want to live in a world where a child DOES NOT have the right to nationality and CANNOT obtain a passport and CAN NOT travel freely!***

***We DO NOT want to live in a world where a male and a female as a parent to a child CANNOT confer citizenship equally on that child through birth or naturalization!***

***We DO NOT want to live in a world where families are separated forcibly due to no proof of nationality or CANNOT fulfill onerous documentation!***

***We DO NOT want to live in a world where there are numerous stateless women and girls, men and boys!***

***We DO NOT want to live in a world where women and girls are at risk or are exposed to violence due to their statelessness!***

**THE NARRATIVE SHOULD CHANGE AND IT IS NOW!**

***We want to live in a world where all children are registered at birth!***

***We want to live in a world where every child has the right to nationality and can obtain a passport and travel freely without hindrances!***

***We want to live in a world where a male and a female as a parent to a child can confer citizenship equally on that child through birth or naturalization devoid of gender discrimination!***

***We want to live in a world where families are held together tightly, there are no risks of separation, and they can care for their children and have access to essential social services!***

***We want to live in a world where there will be no stateless woman or girl, no stateless man or boy!***

***We want to live in a world where women and girls will be protected and not be at risk of any form of violence due to statelessness!***

I would like to reemphasize that as a country, we will continue to strive to uphold the tenets and principles of human rights treaties and agreements all geared towards achieving gender equality. We remain committed to ensuring equal nationality rights for women and men to acquire, change, retain, and transmit their nationality, within the context of the recommendations of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024.

Finally, we would like to extend thanks to our Legislature for the passage of the law. Special thanks to the United Nations, particularly the UNHCR, UNICEF, and UN Women for their enormous support to Liberia over the years as we aspired to achieve gender equality and uphold children's rights and well-being within the context of sustainable development, and to end statelessness.

To this end, we encourage other countries to make reforms in their nationality laws to address the gender discrimination therein, as contained in Article 9, Section 2 of CEDAW that requires States Parties to grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.

Thank you!