

Regional Ministerial Conference on Statelessness

For the first time in West Africa, a regional meeting on stateless persons will bring together ministers in charge of questions of nationality in ECOWAS member countries. High-level Ivorian authorities will participate in this conference, organized jointly by UNHCR and ECOWAS in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 23, 24 and 25 February 2015.

Bringing together experts from all over the world for this trilingual event on the status of nationality and stateless persons, this meeting shall include key stakeholders who contribute to ending statelessness in various ECOWAS countries, including representatives of regional and international organizations, United Nations agencies, civil society national human rights commissions, and academics.

This meeting shall also provide a platform for people who were once

stateless to talk about their difficulties and explain how their status was resolved. A'Salfo, the singer of Magic System and a United Nations Peace Ambassador, as well as Barbara Hendricks, UNHCR Honorary Lifetime Goodwill Ambassador, will share their personal experiences as a contribution to ending statelessness.

The first two days of the conference shall be devoted to a technical meeting to encourage the sharing of knowledge and experience amongst the experts. After defining sources of statelessness, they shall discuss measures to control this scourge seen through the prism of the thematic areas of identification, protection of stateless persons, as well as prevention and reduction of statelessness.

The Conference of Ministers itself shall take place on 25 February, under the auspices of Mr. António Gu-

terres, the High Commissioner, as well as high-level representatives from ECOWAS and the Ivorian authorities. As an outcome of the discussions, it is expected that recommendations for the eradication of statelessness and a joint declaration of West African governments shall be adopted.



#IBELONG Campaign: 10 years to End Statelessness



On 4 November, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the UNHCR launched a global campaign to end statelessness by 2024.

There are two pillars to this campaign. On the one hand, the public is invited to sign an online petition to end statelessness. If you have not already been able to sign this petition, you can click on this link: [#IBelong](#). On the other hand, States were urged to develop campaigns to put an end to

statelessness within the next 10 years. To this end, the campaign includes a 10-point action plan that States can support through national efforts. Specific action points include accession to the Conventions relating to the status of stateless persons, civil registration or indeed the resolutions on current situations affecting stateless persons. The plan may be downloaded [here](#).

For further information, go to the [#IBelong](#) campaign site.

Adoption of a plan of action for the elimination of statelessness in Benin

Within the framework of the global #IBelong campaign, Benin vigorously took up the issue of stateless persons. It is the first country in West Africa to officially adopt at the ministerial level a national plan to end statelessness. This plan will guide future government activities and the stakeholders committed to this struggle.

This plan of action stems from fruitful collaboration between members of Government, civil society and international organizations. It was validated by the Minister of Interior. Discussions amongst the various stakeholders will be crucial for the effective implementation of this plan of action. These reforms are even more timely since the Constitutional Council of Benin revoked the Dahomean Citizenship Code in its Decision of 16 September 2014.

Strategic meetings at the national level

In Liberia, Mali and Gambia, strategic partnership meetings fostered discussion on country-specific statelessness issues. These meetings brought together representatives from key ministries, university scholars, representatives of civil society, and the National Human Rights Commissions

The meeting took place on November 12 - 13 in Mali, and led to the creation of an inter-ministerial committee on statelessness, an innovation in the region. Participants also adopted a multi-action plan including, notably, accession to conventions and administrative and legal citizenship reforms, to be submitted for approval by the Ministry of Justice. In the Gambia, a meeting was held on 5 - 6 December, concluding with the drafting of a national action plan to eliminate statelessness by revising the legal texts on nationality and improving civil registration, amongst other things. It is planned to submit this plan of action to the Minister of Interior for approval. In Liberia, a strategic workshop was organized jointly by the ministry of internal affairs and UNHCR on February 3-4 2015, the participants, representing government, civil society organizations, and UN agencies, pledged their support for UNHCR's global campaign to end statelessness in the next 10 years. They also adopted a communique, listing nine actions that need to be taken in Liberia to eliminate statelessness, including the removal of discrimination from the nationality law.

Continued awareness-raising about statelessness



Several stakeholder trainings have taken place over the past months for the reduction of statelessness.

From 27 - 31 October, some twenty French-speaking scholars from West African universities benefited from a training session on statelessness. Concerned by this theme and aware of the role they can play in contributing to research on statelessness, they decided to set up a network of West African francophone universities on the topic of statelessness. Work has already begun on this. A conference at the University of

Lomé raised awareness amongst Togolese students and Senegalese scholars are currently carrying out a study on the risks of statelessness amongst street children in Senegal.

In order to give more coverage to statelessness in the media, there were trainings to enable journalists to study and deepen their understanding of this issue. A first training was organized for Gambian journalists on 3 - 4 December, then a second one took place in Senegal 16 - 17 December for journalists from the entire region. At the end of this event, the final declaration established a network to foster debate amongst journalists on issues of statelessness and citizenship.

On 18 November the International Human Rights Institute in Strasbourg and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom organized a remote Training session on International Humanitarian Law in Abidjan. Over 80 participants (Ivorian lawyers, civil servants, the military and university academics) were trained on the 1954 and 1961 Conventions relating to statelessness.

Progress on accession to the Statelessness Conventions

A few days after launching the campaign to end statelessness, Niger set the example by joining the list of States party to the 1954 Convention relating to the status of stateless persons.

ECOWAS now has nine States that have acceded to this text and Guinea Bissau will probably be the tenth. Indeed, the Parliament of Guinea Bissau recently approved accession to both conventions on statelessness.

Going out to meet populations at risk of statelessness along the borders of Benin

The UNHCR Office in Benin is continuing its missions along the borders to study the situation of persons at risk of statelessness in these areas.

Alerted by the risk of statelessness facing the population of Kourou-Koulou, the team began by going to this area along the border between Benin and Burkina Faso where sovereignty issues remain unresolved. They discovered that the only maternity in the region is located on the territory of Burkina Faso and the people from Benin born in this clinic face many difficulties to determine their nationality.

In the words of a young student from Benin: “in Burkina Faso, they give us a birth certificate within one week at most. But, when I come to my home in Benin, I ask for the same birth certificate for months without getting it. I have no success with exams and competitions. When I finally do receive it, it serves no purpose because they have written on it that I was born in Burkina Faso. Which law prohibits a citizen of Benin from being born in Burkina?” The UN-



HCR found that the governmental authorities in Benin were very keen to find lasting solutions and continue working towards this.

The UNHCR went on to West Savalou, a region along the border with Togo where very few births are registered and vital statistics are poorly managed. Many people have never possessed an identity card whereas they cross the borders every day for family and/or economic reasons. There is a lack of awareness amongst the population about the importance of civil registration, local officials are not familiar with civil registration procedures and the files are poorly kept, all of

which explains why many people do not have any identity documents.

The team met Esther, a young woman born in Benin without any proof of identity and nationality. She was never registered at birth. She was able to live and go to school in Nigeria with fake identity papers. In 2014, she came back to Benin to register for university but was refused access for lack of a valid identity card. She was given the same reason when she was denied funding for a micro-credit project. There are several thousands in the region like Esther who are exposed to a heightened risk of being stateless.

Situational analysis in the North of Côte d'Ivoire

UNHCR carried out two exploratory missions, one in the North-Central region (Bouake, Korhogo, Ferkessédougou) and the other, organized jointly with the Ministry of Justice and UNESCO, which took place in the North-East at Abengourou, Bondoukou, and Bouna, from 9 - 12 December. Since the populations in these regions are very close to Burkina Faso and Ghana, there are a large proportion of historical migrants and new migrants settled in Côte d'Ivoire.

Several meetings were held with the local authorities, civil society organizations and community representatives who play a key role in vital statistics, civil registration, and the prevention of statelessness. They highlighted the challenges relating to civil registration and strengthening vital statistics in the North of Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the great need for awareness-raising and training on statelessness.

Solutions to prevent and address statelessness in Côte d'Ivoire



The Ivorian government continues to implement the Law on acquisition of nationality by way of declaration (Law N° 2013-653 of 13 September 2013). This is a mechanism that enables stateless persons or those who are at risk of becoming stateless to remedy their situation within the confines of the law. According to the latest figures published by the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Public Freedoms, to date, thousands of people throughout Côte d'Ivoire are said to have signed up during the first phase of implementing this law. Their files are being processed. On 15 December, the Ministry of Justice published a decree to launch the second phase of registration under this law for a period extend-

ing from 1st December 2014 to 30 April 2015.

In collaboration with the Service for Assistance to Refugees and Stateless Persons (SAARA), UNHCR supported the organization of mobile court hearings on 12 November, in Yamoussoukro, whereby 8,000 remedial orders for birth were issued and 205 birth certificates delivered to children born during the post-elections crisis. UNHCR also supported the organization of mobile court hearings in Tiapoum, on the border with Ghana. These efforts make it possible for children to establish their identity, an essential prerequisite for acquiring a nationality.

Studies on Statelessness

Studies continue on statelessness in West Africa. After Côte d'Ivoire, Mirna Adjami, an independent consultant, is researching the status of statelessness and nationality in Liberia.

She found that identity data management is almost non-existent in Liberia, the country in the sub-region with the lowest number of registered births (about 5%). She therefore stressed the need for a reform of the texts relating to nationality in order to mitigate the risk of being stateless as well as the need to register births, as a matter of priority.

Meeting of African NGOs on the right to nationality in Africa

From 26 - 28 November, a network of African NGOs, 'the *Coalition on the right to nationality in Africa*', met to support the preparation of a Protocol on the right to nationality in Africa to complement the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. This meeting, supported by OSIWA and UNHCR, took place in the presence of Mrs. Sahli Fadel, African Commissioner on the rights of peoples and the Special Rapporteur for refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and migrants.

There were discussions to share experiences and views on the situational analysis and the scope of the phenomenon of statelessness in Africa. The Coalition was informed of the state of progress on the draft the protocol and made recommendations/proposals on future areas of cooperation to support and promote this draft protocol until its adoption by the African Union bodies.

Discussions on statelessness and nationality

From 17 - 19 December, a meeting of experts was jointly organized with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights relating to the theme of statelessness and the right to nationality in West Africa.

This meeting, which took place in Saly, Senegal, brought together people from different walks of life: scholars, government officials, representatives from civil society and international organizations. They prepared the next regional conference of ministers by discussing the most important recommendations relating to stateless persons that need to be formulated during this high-level meeting. They went on to contribute their expertise to guide the African Union Commission in drafting a supplementary protocol to the Charter on the Right to Nationality.

Throughout these discussions, participants stressed the importance of seeking solutions and preparing tools that are contextually relevant to African realities.



Statelessness in the news

Follow current news from the West Africa UNHCR Office on our new blog kora.unhcr.org

An interactive map on statelessness in Africa : [L'Afrique, un continent aux millions d'apatrides ?](#) (in french)

UNHCR is working with the Côte d'Ivoire authorities towards the reduction of statelessness : [L'apatridie est une grave injustice qui peut être résolue](#) ((in french)

Launch of the global campaign : [Afrique de l'Ouest: 1 million d'apatrides dont 700 000 en Côte d'Ivoire](#) (in french)

The impact of the global campaign on Africa : [How will the UNHCR's statelessness campaign affect Africa ?](#)

The risk of becoming stateless on Ile aux Oiseaux : [Rescuing populations from the threat of statelessness in northern Benin](#)

Journalists become aware of the issues at stake relating to statelessness in West Africa : [Atelier sur l'apatridie - Sénégal 19 décembre 2014](#) (in french)

The ministerial conference on statelessness : [La Côte d'Ivoire accueille la 1ère conférence ministérielle sur l'apatridie ce 25 février](#) (in french)

