

STATELESSNESS: MONTHLY BULLETIN

April 2015

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A day in the life of... Semegnish (Segma) Asfaw, Programme Executive, World Council of Churches

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Read the full interview in this month's "A day in the life of...." at the bottom of this bulletin.

Announcements & events

2015 UNHCR Award for Statelessness Research

This year, academic institutions are again invited to nominate excellent research by undergraduate, graduate and doctoral researchers in the field of statelessness for the UNHCR Award for Statelessness Research. Three awards from a total prize pool of USD 4,000 will be granted o the best research at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels.

Any work that offers a clear contribution to increasing understanding of the nature and scope of the problem of identifying stateless populations statelessness. understanding the reasons which have led to statelessness, in particular in regions or within disciplines where little research has been done, may be nominated for the Award. Research exploring other topics directly relating to statelessness may also be nominated, including such questions as the operation of legal safeguards to prevent the occurrence of statelessness, the denial or deprivation of nationality resulting in statelessness, protection frameworks for stateless persons and experiences of statelessness from historic, economic, anthropological, sociological, psychological or political perspectives.

Nominations are accepted for any work completed between the 1st of May 2014 and the 1st of June 2015. The full nomination guidelines can be found online here.

Prof. Gerard-René de Groot, Member of the International Jury for the UNHCR Award for Statelessness Research, presenting the Jury Report of the 2014 edition of the Award at the First Global Forum on Statelessness.

Dr Jason Tucker was presented with the Award for Best Doctoral Dissertation in the field of Statelessness.

Deadline for nominations: 1 July 2015.

Panel Discussion at the New School in New York on Statelessness in the 21st Century

This expert panel will interrogate statelessness from multi-disciplinary perspective, discussing the international legal dimensions of statelessness, human rights issues, and how documentary photography and visual storytelling can be used to fill in critical evidence gaps. The Panel Discussion is from 19.30 to 22.00 on Thursday 30 April. Find out more here.

Consultant wanted for UNHCR Good Practices Paper on ensuring that no child is born stateless

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is calling for submissions by highly qualified individuals to deliver a Paper on the prevention of childhood statelessness, in line with its Campaign to End Statelessness in 10 years. These Papers will be used as both advocacy and practical tools to assist States which select particular Actions, design and develop their strategies, drawing on successful, practical examples from other States. The two Papers published thus far can be found here and full details of this opportunity here. **Deadline for proposals: 1 May 2015.**

Universal Periodic Review: upcoming deadlines!

Deadline for Stakeholder Submissions for 24th session (January/February 2016): 22 June 2015

Countries under review in this session are: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Palau, Paraguay, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands and Somalia. Possible issues to raise - Estonia and Latvia are among the countries with the largest known stateless populations globally; Sierra Leone and Somalia continue to discriminate against women in the right to transmit nationality to their children.

Deadline for Stakeholder Submissions for 25th session (April/May 2016): 21 September 2015

Countries under review in this session are: Antigua and Barbuda, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Papua New Guinea, Saint Vincent and the Samoa, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Tajikistan, United R. of Tanzania, Thailand and Trinidad and Tobago. Possible issues to raise - Thailand has the second largest known stateless population globally; Sudan and Swaziland continue to discriminate against women in the right to transmit nationality to their children.

All submission deadlines for the current UPR cycle can be found online <u>here</u>. For information about how to make a Stakeholder Submission, visit the <u>website of UPR Info</u>.

What's new: Publications, Tools & Resources

NGO joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review on Nepal

The Nepal Civil Network of Citizenship Rights, Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights and Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion made a joint submission on Nepal to the UN Human Rights Council at the 23rd session of the Universal Periodic Review. This submission outlines the challenges which Nepal faces in terms of gender discrimination in nationality law and practice, also touching on the problem of statelessness arising from this discriminatory regime.

"Citizenship Deprivation: A Normative Analysis"

Paper by Rainer Bauböck and Vesco Paskalev in *Liberty and Security in Europe,* which considers from a political theory perspective how deprivation policies reflect specific conceptions of political community. Download the paper here.

European Network on Statelessness: Weekly blogs...

The European Network on Statelessness (ENS) maintains an active blog on its website, with contributions each week from different members of this civil society alliance as well as others who are invited to write about their work or about law and policy developments. You can subscribe to the ENS newsletter and blog updates here. To give you an idea of the diverse content, these were the blogs published over the last month:

- Catherine Cosgrave (Immigrant Council of Ireland) <u>Statelessness in Ireland international obligations and</u>
 national reality
- Atarína Fajnorová (The Human Rights league, Slovakia) Do stateless people have a right to die?
- Charline Becker (Hungarian Helsinki Committee), Jus Soli: A miraculous solution to prevent statelessness?
- Adam Weiss (European Roma Rights Centre), <u>Thoughts on Strategic Litigation: Can EU law prevent and reduce</u>
 <u>Roma statelessness in Europe?</u>

What's new: Law & Policy

Human Rights Council Resolutions

During its 28th session this March, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a Resolution on Birth registration and the right of everyone to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. The resolution acknowledges that "registering a person's birth is a vital step towards the promotion and protection of all his or her human rights, and that persons without birth registration are more vulnerable to marginalization, exclusion, discrimination, violence, statelessness, exploitation and abuse". The Council also adopted a Resolution on The continuing grave deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, in which states were reminded of their obligation to register births without discrimination of any kind and calls upon states to do so irrespective of the status of the child's parents. There was also a Resolution on The Situation of human rights in Myanmar, in which the Council reiterated its concern about the situation of the Rohingya minority and called upon the government to ensure equal access to full citizenship and related rights.

Status of accessions to the Statelessness Conventions

Thanks to the active accessions campaign that has been conducted over the past few years, the UN Statelessness Conventions have a growing number of state parties. Here is UNHCR's updated world map of state parties.

Popular on Twitter this Month

From @amnesty: ACT NOW to help end the statelessness crisis in the #DominicanRepublic! http://owl.li/LpzqN #SummitoftheAmericas

From @refugees: What does it feel like to be **#stateless**? Hear from Africans striving to say **#ibelong** http://trib.al/n7QMdFw

From <u>@StatelessWA:</u> Birth certificates issued by #Mali open doors for Mauritanian #refugee children http://bit.ly/1HvkYga via @Refugees #Statelessness #Grin223

From <u>@liesImul</u>: <u>#ACHPR56</u> <u>#AccessToNationality</u> <u>#study</u> <u>#Statelessness</u> <u>#CRAI</u> NGO network calls on NGOs to join the coalition <u>http://www.citizenshiprightsinafrica.org</u>

From <u>@refugees:</u> "Many countries in [Latin America] are already champions in our campaign to eradicate **#statelessness**" Our chief Guterres <u>@oas_official</u>

A day in the life of...

Semegnish (Segma) Asfaw

Programme Executive, World Council of Churches (WCC)

How did you get involved in working on statelessness?

I first came across statelessness in 2002 when I was doing research about children's rights. I was very surprised to learn that in our times, when the discourse on human rights is at its height, there are still people living with no nationality - i.e. who have no legal affiliation whatsoever to any state, and therefore are deprived of their basic human rights. I found it quite disturbing that the absence of a single document (identity card) can dramatically affect peoples' lives. A few years later, in 2010, during the meeting of our Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), a request was made from our commissioners to also include statelessness as part of our advocacy efforts. I was very happy to be assigned this task, and since then, I have been learning a great deal about statelessness and stateless populations in the world.



Can you give us a short description of the type of work you do?

Statelessness is not well known or understood in many circles. We therefore believe that a constructive dialogue and meaningful contribution can only be achieved when our partners know what about statelessness, what it entails, and how it affects the life of so many unknown and "legally invisible" human beings. Awareness raising is therefore the

primary focus in our work. Whenever possible, we also organize solidarity visits to stateless groups; this is an expression of solidarity, but also an opportunity to shed light on the challenges and discrimination stateless people experience. I am trying to set up an informal and small – but efficient – network of partners who will become regional ecumenical advocates for the human rights of stateless people. This will also include exploring possibilities to organize regional training workshops with the help of various UNHCR and international actors, in order to help our constituency understand what statelessness is, how we can help ensure basic rights to stateless people, and also start reflecting on how we can solve existing cases of statelessness.

How has the World Council of Churches (WCC) developed its engagement on statelessness?

In December 2011, the WCC organised a solidarity visit to stateless populations in Bangladesh (Rohingya and Bihari communities) and Nepal (Bhutanese community). The visits were followed by a <u>consultation</u> on stateless people in South Asia (in Dhaka, Bangladesh). After reporting back to our CCIA commission, we received the mandate to broaden our research and advocacy work at the global level with the aim to develop ecumenical advocacy on rights and dignity of stateless people. Consequently, in February 2013, we organized an international <u>consultation</u> on *The human rights of stateless people* (Washington DC, USA). The aim was to assess the situation of stateless people in the world including those who are stranded and confined to refugee camps during several generations, with often little or no hope for change.

In November 2013, the WCC 10th Assembly (Busan, South Korea), that brought together more than 3500 participants, adopted WCC's first Public Issue Statement on *The Human Rights of Stateless People*. This was the result of the deliberations of the two consultations, as well as of on-going collaboration with UNHCR colleagues. Also, UNHCR brought a world renowned photo exhibit on statelessness by Greg Constantine to this event.

The WCC then organized an international ecumenical <u>consultation</u> on <u>Churches Advocating for Stateless People</u> (Den Dolder, The Netherlands) from 12 to 14 September 2014, just prior to the first Global Forum on Statelessness in the Hague. Participants of the meeting agreed on a set of <u>Recommendations</u> that will be shared widely among our network, and will serve as a basis for our advocacy efforts. The organisers of the Global Forum also gave space to our small ecumenical delegation to share to <u>present</u> the results of our deliberations.

What do you most enjoy about this work?

What I enjoy the most is to try to bring to light, i.e. to the understanding and knowledge of people, the situation of millions of legally "invisible" people. We need to speak for stateless people, and as much as possible WITH stateless people: thanks to modern technology, we can bring their voice and reflections to our deliberations in conferences and international fora. Stateless people are resilient despite all the hurdles they go through.

What are the biggest challenges you face and what do you hope to accomplish through your work?

Despite an increasing international attention to statelessness, very little is known about it today in many circles. People tend to think of stateless people as refugees and/or migrants, when most stateless people actually have never left their country. Also, statelessness can have different faces depending on the context. For instance, not all stateless people live in camps. In some countries, people may live their lives without knowing they are stateless until the day they want to travel abroad and cannot get a passport.

I would like to see greater collaboration on the issue of statelessness among various actors: faith based organizations, civil society, UNHCR and other UN agencies. Faith communities being present even in remote areas, it is important to creatively use their opportunities for registering important life events in ways that help people to secure documents that can reduce statelessness

What advice would you give to someone who wants to get involved in / others working on statelessness?

- 1. Although on the increase, statelessness is not yet a much known issue, and getting funding can sometimes become a laborious job. Yet, one should not feel discouraged, and should be creative. It is possible to start sharing about statelessness with simple means (e.g. social media) in various contexts and circles.
- 2. Statelessness can sometimes be perceived as a very technical and legal issue. That can be the case. Yet, this should not be an obstacle for those who do not have a legal background: we need to bring the discussion down to the basics, i.e. the human rights of the individual.
- 3. It is important to give a voice to the stateless, not only to speak on their behalf. As much as possible, we need to bring them to conferences, discussions, deliberations.

Contribute to the Statelessness Monthly Bulletin via news@InstituteSI.org or visit www.InstituteSI.org