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A day in the life of... Focus Development Association, human rights NGO in Madagascar

"The resolution of statelessness means so much to the affected population in terms of their condition, emotions and dignity. Getting into this work requires a real commitment. The more the challenges are immense, the more work is needed by involved actors. To succeed you will be strengthening the values of humanism, tolerance, perseverance and this requires strength!"

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

Spotlight on: One-year Anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration

In West Africa, around one million people are estimated to be stateless or at risk of statelessness. Many people in the region fail to acquire nationality due to laws that prevent women from conferring nationality to their children, as well as due to lack of effective birth registration practices. The absence of data and education further impedes efforts to eradicate statelessness. The [Abidjan Declaration](#), adopted on [25 February 2015](#) by the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) outlined governments' commitments to address this issue: the declaration emphasises the vital need for States to guarantee that every person within the region has a recognised nationality.

Exactly one year later, West Africa marked the [first anniversary of the Declaration of Abidjan](#). In the twelve months since the adoption of the Declaration, several States have taken concrete steps towards eradicating statelessness. For instance, **Côte d'Ivoire** was commended for implementing a provision within its nationality law, which makes it possible to apply for nationality for certain groups of people, including those who are stateless. The provision proved a success, as more than 123.000 people submitted applications to the authorities, some of whom were stateless. 6.400 people have since acquired confirmation of their nationality, and another 6.000 received late birth certificates, an important measure to have their nationality confirmed in the future. **Benin** and **Gambia** have approved elaborate action plans, at the ministerial level, that work towards eradicating statelessness. Both **Mali** and **Guinea-Bissau** have acceded to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions. Other positive progress has been made as well, as other States work on action plans to end statelessness and voice their intention to accede to the Statelessness Convention.

The one-year anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration was celebrated with a range of activities and publications, including film screenings, radio shows and articles such as [From stateless to having a nationality: The story of Mamadou](#). The story presents the life of Mamadou Salogo, from his birth into statelessness until him acquiring Ivorian nationality at the age of 59. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration [Senegalese artists joined UNHCR in the fight against statelessness: Cheick Lô](#) and [Bideew Bou Bess](#) also contributed to raising awareness about the UNHCR #IBelong campaign.

What's new: Law & Policy

[Canada reconsidering the revocation of nationality from dual citizens who engage in certain acts against the national interests](#): In May 2015 Canada created new grounds for citizenship revocation through legislative changes allowing citizenship to be taken away from dual citizens for certain acts against the national interests of Canada but a new Bill now repeals these grounds. Similarly, in **France**, the move to expand powers of deprivation of nationality in response to the Paris attacks (reported in [last month's bulletin](#)) are also being reconsidered, as [President Hollande reportedly dropped the plans for constitutional reform after parliament failed to reach an agreement](#).

[Bahamas: towards gender equality in nationality law](#): Parliament has passed a bill to reform the constitution which will, if approved by the public referendum later this year, ensure gender equality in the citizenship law of the Bahamas.

[ECOWAS Court calls for global movement to end statelessness](#): The President of ECOWAS has advocated for a “global movement to end the scourge of statelessness” while at a forum in Abuja organised with the UNHCR.

[UAE authorities revoke citizenship of children of human rights defender](#): Authorities of the United Arab Emirates have revoked the citizenship of the children of detained human rights defender Mohammed Abdul Razzaq Al-Siddiq, leaving the children stateless and without proof of identity.

[Ray of hope for children of Bahraini women married to foreigners](#): Bahraini women married to foreign nationals may soon be allowed to confer nationality to their children. According to MP Roua Al Hayki (Chairperson of Woman and Child Committee in Parliament) such a law will be realised in three months. Just two days before, on [February 16-17](#), the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, together with Bahrain Women Union, Bahrain Women Association and Equality Now held a gender equality workshop, the [Gulf Regional Conference on Citizenship Laws](#) in Manama, Bahrain.

[Thailand to grant citizenship to stateless scholarship students](#): In Thailand’s efforts in addressing statelessness the Department of Provincial Administration officially requested all Thai districts to identify and issue legal status to eligible stateless students in Thailand under the government’s database. Up to 65.000 students may benefit from the directive, which equals about 15% of those registered as stateless in Thailand at the end of October 2015.

[664 persons of Indonesian descent in the Philippines end their statelessness](#): At least 664 out of 8.745 persons of Indonesian descent (PIDs) residing in the Philippines ended their statelessness with confirmation and registration of their citizenship. Other cases are still under review and succeeding confirmations will follow at a later date. Also in the Philippines... A **[recent landmark ruling of the Supreme Court favoured foundlings as citizens](#)** in relation to Senator Grace Poe admissibility to run for president in the May elections. Before the ruling Poe, a foundling herself, was barred from running for office because she was not considered a national.

[Citizenship to Romani woman following Italian Court decision](#): A decision by the Civil Court of Rome brings Europe one step closer to ending Romani statelessness by overturning a previous refusal of citizenship for a Romani woman. The woman of Bosnian origin was born and raised in Italy, fulfilled the conditions for Italian citizenship, yet was refused on the technicality that her parents had not completed all of the registration formalities for her as a child. The Court confirmed however that the woman is Italian, providing a precedent for the future.

Announcements & events

[Statelessness Summer Course](#): You can now apply for the Institute’s annual Statelessness Summer Course. Check out the [flyer](#) for more information on the 2016 edition of the global Statelessness Summer Course that will be held 1-5 August at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. **Application deadline: 15 April.**

[ENS #StatelessKids Youth Congress](#): The European Network on Statelessness is organising a three day event to engage with young socially conscious and active participants who are motivated to help end childhood statelessness. The event will take place at the Maastricht University Campus in Brussels between 11 and 13 July 2016. To find out more about the event and how to register attendance, go to the [website](#). **Application deadline: 15 May.**

[OSIWA grant opportunity](#): The Open Society Initiative for West Africa launched a call for proposals. The enhancement of citizenship and documentation of identity are included as specific themes for which OSIWA seeks proposals. **Submission deadline: 30 April.**

[Nowhere People Project with Greg Constantine](#): On **7 April** 2016 Greg Constantine and his project Nowhere People will feature at a presentation and discussion at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. Greg is an award-winning documentary photojournalist, his latest book documenting the lives of stateless people around the world. Also see his recent [TEDxTalk](#).

[Conference 'Tackling Statelessness: Exchange of Experiences and Good Practices'](#): On **15 April 2016** the European Migration Network is hosting a Conference on tackling statelessness in Luxembourg-city. **Registration deadline: 31 March.**

What’s new: Publications, Tools & Resources

[International Affairs Forum: on Migration and Statelessness](#): The latest issue of International Affairs Forum is on the topic of migration and statelessness. This includes articles on the *Link between Statelessness and Refugeehood* by Professor Helene Lambert and on *Displacement and Statelessness* by Professor Elizabeth Ferris. Professor James Hathaway and Dr. Victoria Redclift also comment on statelessness issues that they have encountered in their research.

[Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2016](#): on International Women's Day 2016, UNHCR published its latest annual update of this document on gender equality in nationality laws and statelessness.

[The Implementation of the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons: Procedures and Practice in Selected EU States](#): This PhD thesis by Katia Bianchini argues that the recognition of stateless status as well as the related application of a basic set of rights are more likely to occur when Member States of the European Union incorporate specific and exact laws and procedures.

[Migration and Statelessness: Turning the Spotlight on Malaysia](#): Rodziana Mohamed Razali, Rohaida Nordin and Tamara Joan Duraisingam published an article in the *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, aiming to unravel the interrelatedness between migration and statelessness in Southeast Asia.

Statelessness in the Dominican Republic: Minority Rights Group International issued a [press release](#) in relation to its [new documentary](#) that "*lays bare the harsh realities faced by the Dominican Republic's stateless citizens.*" The film, together with a photo story, interviews with activists and in depth research forms a new [multimedia story pack](#) highlighting the problem of statelessness of Dominicans of Haitian descent. Also on this topic, Amnesty International has launched a new petition to focus attention on the situation of stateless people of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic: [#Yes!Exist](#). You can watch the [video](#) and sign the [petition](#). In the 2016 overview by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [Haiti: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2016](#), one of the issues discussed is the humanitarian needs resulting from the forced and voluntary return of thousands of with Haitian descent from the Dominican Republic.

[Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness Launching Video](#): Watch the launching video of the Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness (RED ANA). The [website](#) is available in English and in Spanish.

["Everywhere is Trouble": A Briefing on the Situation of Rohingya Refugees from Myanmar in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia](#): The Burmese Rohingya Organization UK & Fortify Rights published this briefing on the situation of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who fled to other countries. The briefing is based on meetings and interviews held with Rohingya refugees, survivors of human trafficking and government officials, amongst other people.

A few other resources of interest spotted this month:

- [On the Threshold of Statelessness: Palestinian narratives of loss and erasure](#): Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's article about how Palestinians in Europe "*negotiate, mobilise, and/or resist, and ultimately problematise*" notions of statelessness as a concept and as a marker of their identity.
- [Where on Earth are you?](#) For *London Review of Books*, Frances Stonor Saunders discusses the complexities of today's border regimes and what she calls "the obsession with the verified self". You can also [watch](#) the lecture.
- [Irish British Subjects](#): Read this article by Adrian Berry on an obscure, forgotten, and dying class of British nationals: Irish British Subjects.
- [Paweogo: Statelessness and Migration](#): A blog about statelessness, migration, refugees and climate change.
- [The Constitutional Court's Decision on the Compatibility of the Hungarian Statelessness Determination Procedure with International Law](#): Tamás Molnár's case note on the decision by the Hungarian Constitutional Court on the compatibility of the Hungarian statelessness determination procedure with international law.

Popular on Twitter this Month

UN Refugee Agency @Refugees Mar 20 "The most important thing is registering my children" - we're helping vulnerable Syrians at risk of statelessness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-2yr2...>

Alyssa Eisenstein @alyssaeisen Mar 22 Without women at #SyriaTalks, issues of nationality, #statelessness would be overlooked. -Monica McWilliams [@HouseForeign](#) [@InclusvSecurity](#)

Not For Sale @NFS Mar 17 Did YOU know Kru Nam once rescued 5 stateless kids from a karaoke bar... in front of the bouncer?! This and more: <https://www.notforsalecampaign.org/stories/2016/0...>

Child Rights (CRIN) @CRINwire Mar 17 Round-up of child rights globally. This week: death penalty, early marriage & statelessness <http://bit.ly/1potJDn>

We Are All Dominican @Dominicanxs Mar 16 Check out [@MinorityRights](#) multimedia pack on statelessness in DR and the struggle of Dominicans of Haitian descent <http://stories.minorityrights.org/dominican-republic/...>

Bronwen Manby @BronwenManby Mar 24 The early advocacy of Chrystal Macmillan on the right to nationality of married women <http://dangerouswomenproject.org/2016/03/24/chrystal-macmillan/> [@DangerousWomen](#) [#statelessness](#)

Focus Development Association

NGO working on human rights in Madagascar and implementing partner of UNHCR as part of a project to resolve statelessness in Madagascar



Can you give us a short description of the kind of work the organization does?

Focus Development Association (FDA) has twenty years of experience and at its creation in 1993, the purpose of its founding members was clear: surpass the role of a simple observer and go towards taking durable and sustainable grass roots action. We research, train, provide development policies / strategies, and design, manage, evaluation / program interventions, all from a rights-based approach. Our work is oriented towards issues of discrimination, direct or indirect, in a context where poverty affects the overwhelming majority of the Madagascar population.

Gender relations and problems specific to women / girls, children, persons with disabilities, and more recently stateless persons are central to our work. Whether in health, nutrition, education, economic empowerment, community development, civic and political participation, citizenship and governance, the theme of our actions is the same: the realization of human rights.

In partnership with state institutions, international, regional and national NGOs and with local communities, FDA has contributed to the revision of the Madagascar family code. In doing so, the age of marriage for example was brought up to 18 for both girls and boys where previously it had been 14 for girls and 17 for boys. In Madagascar, FDA was one of the pioneering organizations in the investigation of sexual exploitation of children. Also, the work we have done with regards to promoting gender equality has meant that we were among the winners of the "Human rights of the French Republic 2014 Prize", which was brought on by our initiatives to promote the representation of women in decision-making bodies.

Briefly describe what kind of statelessness activities your organization is involved in.

Since 2011, FDA has worked with UNHCR to address statelessness in Madagascar and since 2014, we are the implementing partner of the initiative "Prevention and reduction of statelessness in Madagascar". Via this initiative with UNHCR, FDA is involved in working towards rendering the Madagascar nationality law compliant with international principles of human rights. Respect for gender equality is one of them. We conduct advocacy and lobby policy makers, including the Presidency of the Republic, the Parliament and the Government. This action will continue until new provisions are adopted to solve the problem of statelessness in the country. Our capacity building projects target the central and provincial government officials, universities, communities affected by statelessness, the media and civil society.

We also have a "legal assistance to stateless" component of this project. Here, we help stateless or potentially stateless persons to confirm their nationality or acquire a nationality at no charge. The aim is also to create jurisprudence regarding resolving statelessness. The project has produced information materials and raised awareness for stateless persons on their rights. Scattered in their communities, these materials have helped inspire the creation of a para-legal network within the communities that can facilitate legal assistance.

Meanwhile, the project has paid special attention to the socio-cultural dimension of the problem because the reluctance vis-à-vis stateless persons is real. In order to create a "better living together" atmosphere between the different components of Madagascar society, the project worked on several fronts. It introduced the theme of the resolution of statelessness for instance into the process of national reconciliation. It developed a close cooperation with the media and launched a media campaign called "Gasy Jiaby" ("All Madagascar").

We hope to contribute to the adoption of a new nationality law that respects international principles of human rights and solves the problem of statelessness in the country. Having launched the debate on nationality, statelessness and reflections on the Madagascar national identity, we hope that the debate will continue and be relayed at all levels to move towards a "will to live together" between the different components of Madagascar society.

Could you describe a Particular project you are working on right now?

The media campaign "Gasy Jiaby", launched in 2015, is one of our ongoing projects. First, it is an opportunity to portray the UNHCR IBelong campaign. More importantly, it informs and educates the public about our initiatives to prevent and reduce statelessness in Madagascar. We conducted several capacity building sessions for the media and organized press trip so that journalists can meet the stateless, talk with them, to know their difficulties and daily challenges. This approach has been particularly effective. Now, various articles on the problem of statelessness spontaneously come out in the press and on social networks. They address the issue of statelessness from all angles. This is combined with exchanges and discussions on the subject on the website and a Facebook account that the project has created and

dedicated to "Gasy Jiaby". The materials produced by this media campaign on statelessness regularly feed the website and Facebook account.

The products of this media campaign are varied. Several videos, testimonials and radio programmes chronicling the experiences of stateless persons and others who have experienced difficulties with regard to nationality were broadcast. One of the products that made a buzz in this campaign was an awareness-raising song on resolving statelessness, produced and performed by a famous Madagascan singer. It is broadcasted in audio and video versions. As icing on the cake, a televised debate entitled "Who is Madagascar?" debating national identity, has been broadcast. Debaters "for" and "against" the granting of citizenship to the stateless native to Madagascar participated, as well as representatives of the affected community. This televised debate put public resistance to the resolution of statelessness on one side against arguments as well as international and national provisions on the nationality on the other side. These materials are available on: www.gasyjiaby.org

What do you most enjoy about this work?

The problem of statelessness is long-term in Madagascar. Before the UNHCR - Focus initiative, the majority population, and even some leaders, did not know about the matter. What could be more rewarding than hearing the "layman", a car washer, who tells his colleague about statelessness. Or, the response of a lady who asked why she does not educate her children to say: "My children are 'stateless', they have no civil state, that is why they do not go to school." One final encouraging feedback.

A participant in one of the information meetings on stateless person confesses, months later, "the first time I heard the word 'statelessness' {...}, I thought it was a disease! With your campaign now, everyone knows what it is! "

We are also involved in various international and regional meetings on the eradication of statelessness. We learn a lot from experiences of other countries. They inspire us to come up with new strategies and they boost further our initiatives that we launched and help us to meet the challenges we face!

What do you find are the biggest challenges you face in your work? What advice would you give to someone who wants to get involved in / others working on statelessness?

The biggest challenge is the reform of the Nationality laws and the application of international conventions. This is because there is a lot of reluctance to solving the issue of statelessness in Madagascar. In short, this reluctance covers political, legal, economic and social dimensions. They include some policy makers and technical managers in charge of the reform or dealing with statelessness cases. The fear of the reaction of public opinion is also a source of hesitation. The mere fact of having appointed a senator from the affected communities in February 2016 hit the headlines for a few weeks.

We must also recognize the importance of the insularity of Madagascar, exacerbated by its location, disconnected to the continental realities, including those related to the regulation of migration between neighbouring countries. So much so that each initiative for the resolution of statelessness is seen as a way to facilitate access to Madagascan nationality by foreigners. Or, it is considered an indirect way to promote the naturalization of *vazaha* ("white" Western) and especially the "new rich" (people of Indian or Chinese origin). This opinion revolved around the worry of a growing "new form of colonization" of the country. Moreover, our organization is often accused of being "agents in the pay of new colonizers." Fortunately, deconstructing misconceptions on the subject is for us an exciting challenge every day. It is an exercise that makes discover new things daily. It drives us continually to find the best way to proceed.

The resolution of statelessness means so much to the effected population in terms of their condition, emotions and dignity. Getting into this work requires a real commitment. The more the challenges are immense, the more work is needed by involved actors. To succeed you will be strengthening the values of humanism, tolerance, perseverance and this requires strength! This is both motivation and advice to encourage people who want to work in this area.

To this end, we encourage raising awareness among national and international media on the problem, to make allies and/or champions of the resolution of statelessness in the country. Second, it is essential to document the problem through research, whether academic, applied or operational. The results of the research will help to better build arguments, to make successful advocacy and lobbying more impactful. It is crucial to present concrete and evidence-based arguments. Thirdly, the development of international / regional cooperation is essential. The latter is inspired by the exchange of best practices as well as pitfalls to avoid. It strengthens the capacity of stakeholders, and this must be constantly maintained to be able to stay the course!

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news@InstituteSI.org or visit www.InstituteSI.org