



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Gender Equality in Nationality Laws

Side event on the margins of the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

16 March, 2017

2.45 pm – 4.15 pm, Uganda House

Co-organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Statelessness, or the absence of a nationality, is a problem affecting some 10 million people globally. There is no region on the planet that does not have significant numbers of stateless persons. In addition to the indignity of being without a nationality, stateless persons are often denied basic rights, such as access to education and health care.

Their exclusion from citizenship marks their lives, and those of their families and communities, in dramatic ways. Yet while statelessness is a serious problem, it is one that can be resolved with relatively simple changes in national law and practice.

Parliamentarians therefore have a vital role to play in implementing legal reforms to prevent, reduce and ultimately end statelessness worldwide.

Nationality laws which do not grant women equality with men in conferring nationality to their children are a major cause of statelessness. Discrimination in nationality laws is still a reality today in many countries around the world. Parliaments generally hold the keys to resolving and preventing statelessness at the national level, where small adjustments to the nationality law can make a major difference in the lives of individuals and communities.

While significant progress has been achieved in reforming nationality laws, more needs to be done. In the past decade, thirteen States have taken steps to enable mothers to transfer nationality to their children on an equal basis as fathers. Twenty-six countries worldwide, however, continue to discriminate against women in their ability to confer nationality on their children. This is particularly problematic in the context of the Syrian displacement crisis, where gender discrimination in nationality laws coupled with challenges accessing civil documentation amongst the displaced population increases the risk of statelessness.

Against the backdrop of a growing willingness by States to take action, IPU and UNHCR will host a side event to promote gender equality in nationality laws. The side event will focus on concrete steps that parliamentarians and others can take to prevent and reduce statelessness from a gender perspective.

Panelists will include members of parliament, UNHCR representatives as well as civil society representatives.

Reference documents:

IPU-UNHCR Handbook for Parliamentarians on Nationality and Statelessness,
www.ipu.org/english/handbks.htm#stateless