



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy For everyone

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IPU

Intervention at the UNHCR Executive Committee Inter-Parliamentary Union

It is my pleasure to address the Executive Committee of UNHCR and take part in this discussion on our collective roles and efforts to put an end to statelessness. On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I thank you for the opportunity to bring the voice of parliaments to these exchanges.

Allow me to begin by thanking UNHCR for the excellent partnership we have enjoyed over the years – this is a very important and constructive collaboration which we value and look forward to continuing working together on key issues that affect the lives of millions of men and women, boys and girls today.

We heard on Monday moving testimonies on the lives and challenges stateless men and women face. For many of us, having a nationality seems to be an obvious fact of life. A right taken for granted. In fact there is no reason why in today's world anyone should be deprived of or live without a nationality.

Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "[e]veryone has the right to a nationality" and that "[n]o one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality".

Concretely, this means that every individual, everywhere in the world, has the right to have a legal connection with a State. Every individual has the right to a sense of identity, to the protection of a State and to fundamental civil and political rights.

There are many laws and international conventions today that relate to the question of citizenship. States have signed up to international and regional treaties that commit to ensuring that every man, woman and child has a nationality. And yet today, millions of men and women, girls and boys in the world have no nationality and are stateless.

This means that millions of people today cannot live a life that you or I would call "normal"; cannot enroll their children in school, own or lease property, work, marry, travel or vote. Or even bury their dead, as we heard on Monday.

We heard and know that solutions exist. They are in the hands of States; they are in the hands of decision-makers - governments but also parliaments. This is where the Inter-Parliamentary Union and its Member Parliaments have a role to play.

We know that the solution resides in building a legal framework that prevents and prohibits statelessness. This means addressing discrimination in laws and in particular gender based discrimination. Members of parliament have a responsibility to raise this in their countries, review laws and amend them. And we have seen results – women MPs for instance working across party lines and initiating bills to address key inequality issues, defending the rights of those that

not heard and all too often forgotten.

We also know that laws are only as good as the effort and resources put into implementing them. This means a need for constant monitoring of the impact of law and budget allocations aimed at supporting enforcement programmes and structures. For members of parliament it means regularly questioning the government on implementation and adopting the resources required for laws to have impact. And here again, we have seen MPs questioning their government, asking for accounts and reallocating resources during budgetary debates, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and the voiceless.

Moreover for laws to be effective, they must be widely known and understood so that they can be enforced. We heard of the challenge raised by the notion of statelessness – how difficult it is to understand, visualize and monitor. Members of parliament, as opinion leaders can and do spread the word – as representatives of the people, they engage with constituents on a regular basis, they listen and explain so that those that have no voice are also represented.

This is what the IPU believes in and has been working towards over the past years. Through our Committee on international humanitarian law, we have worked to sensitize MPs to humanitarian and human rights law and to statelessness. Information is crucial; it is the starting point for any action. Resolving statelessness will gain in strength through wider dissemination of the real issues at stake, and challenging misconceptions. I therefore call for a strengthened cooperation with parliaments and their members for them to champion statelessness issues in their countries.

For parliaments to act, they also need to have tools and access to best practices. The IPU and UNHCR have collaborated over the years on the production of several handbooks for parliamentarians; our latest being one *Good practices in nationality laws for the prevention and reduction of statelessness*. We are now working on disseminating this tool in parliament and assisting MPs in making use of it to engage in reforms.

We can certainly do more and the IPU will continue to support such engagement.

As UN Deputy Secretary General, Amina Mohamed mentioned on Monday, acting to end statelessness is a human rights obligation, it is also a moral obligation. We have the tools, we know the answers, we need to act.

On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, let me say that we will continue to raise political awareness of parliaments on statelessness; we will engage in particular young parliamentarians and women parliamentarians in this effort; we will continue to monitor progress and draw attention to legislative reforms to address statelessness at each of our Assemblies; we will continue to support parliaments in their legislative, budgetary and oversight role to push for reform and action to ensure that all men and women have a legal identity and belonging.

And we look forward to working together to end statelessness in the coming years.

Thank you.